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**I BEAR WITNESS –
AN 11 YEAR-OLD HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR**

LA VIE QU'ILS M'ONT VOLES*

by Henri Parens

*** THE LIFE THEY STOLE FROM ME**

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With profound gratitude, for so many things,

to my mother, Rosa Pruszinowska,

to my wife, Rachel, and

to my sons, Erik, Karl, and Joshua,
and their young families

Because of them,

By them,

I am who I am.

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You who live safe
 In your warm houses,
 You who find, returning in the evening,
 Hot food and friendly faces:

Consider if this is a man
 Who works in the mud
 Who does not know peace
 Who fights for a scrap of bread
 Who dies because of a yes or a no.
 Consider if this is a woman,
 Without hair and without name
 With no more strength to remember,
 Her eyes empty and her womb cold
 Like a frog in winter.

Meditate that this came about:
 I commend these words to you.
 Carve them in your hearts
 At home, in the street,
 Going to bed, rising;
 Repeat them to your children,

Or may your house fall apart,
 May illness impede you,
 May your children turn their faces from you.

Primo Levi

(From *Se Questo è un Uomo* [*If this is a man*]; Translated 1958)

CHAPTER 1

Getting Into What Happened: *“Incominciamo”**

I have long struggled with wanting to and avoiding publicly bearing witness that the Holocaust happened, that it happened to me and my family. What happened to me happened in one form or another to millions of us. It is so much a part of what made me be who I became, who I am. I have for years heard that “we must bear witness”, and yet, I have not been able to get to this until now. At the start of this writing I am 73. What happened, started when I was 11.

The Nazis robbed me of “my life that would have been”. I was one of millions they robbed and murdered. The Nazis of the 1933-1945 era slaughtered 50 million human beings, among them 6 million Jews. 6 millions Jews out of 50 million is “just” 12 percent of those slaughtered. But the crime they committed against humanity stands unique in the history of mass slaughters. Wars bring slaughter. So do revolutions. However, these 6 million non-combatant, non-revolutionary human beings were murdered by government sanction, by vile plan, by barbaric methods carried out by a civilized people debased by megalomaniac fanaticism—murdered just because they were Jews.

I want to immediately say two things.

First, when I say “the Nazis”, I don’t mean the Germans. I mean those Germans, French, Poles, Russians, Belgians, Hollanders, and others of Europe who were overtly, outspoken Nazis and those who were covertly Nazis. I was among those directly

* “Let us start”, in tribute to Primo Levi.

victimized by the French Nazis and indirectly—protests to the contrary by the Vichy-French notwithstanding—by the German Nazis, and my mother, my brother and my father, along with many of my extended family were, from what I know to this moment, subsequently exterminated by the German Nazis in Poland.

And second, when I say “my life that would have been”, I do not mean that I wish I had lived it out. The life I do have, the life I have lived is and has been immeasurably rewarding and gratifying, beyond expectation. “My life that would have been” is the life of which the Nazis robbed me, the one I started to live, as my memory permits, in Bruxelles, Belgium, the life I lived until I was 11 years old. Resulting from the atrocities perpetrated by Nazis, of those I loved as a child, I lost all but three cousins. I lost my mother, my father and my brother. So far I have not found out their fate. I lost aunts, uncles and cousins I loved, whose faces I see (remembered by photos) but whose names I can’t remember now. I lost living in the city that I love to this day, Bruxelles. I lost speaking Yiddish and French daily, both of which I love. I also lost what I might have become. I doubt that it would have been better than who I am. But I have thought: “What might I have done in that first life?”

I think at least one of the problems is that even though I don’t need to have lived that first life—I doubt I would have been any more gratified and grateful than I am today—there is still somewhere in me, this experience of feeling violated, insulted to extreme, robbed. Maybe it’s that I did not decide which life I would live; that I had to live the one I have lived, I could not live the one given me at birth. No doubt there is more to this feeling violated, insulted, robbed, than I have said. Maybe it will get clearer as I go on in this search, in this effort to further understand and record the impact of the Holocaust on me, and on those dearest to me, my wife and my sons. In a

technical document I reported on some ways in which the Holocaust impacted on my psychic development (1999).

For a psychiatrist who can express feelings with much facility, feelings of love and feelings of anger and of quiet rage, with ease, I am troubled by how inarticulate I am about all this. I can only half-competently detail what happened. Maybe, as I go along, feelings may leak out that will make clearer what, for one human being, made what happened so bad. It would probably help me even more than I feel helped already from years of working it all through in personal psychoanalysis, but mostly in on-going self-analysis.

I started to write my witness report on August 14, 2002. The date stands out.

Nous sommes a Wellfleet, MA. Rachel, Erik, Karl, Joshua, leurs femmes et les enfants sont alles dans les environs, pour les explorer et jouer au bord d'un lac. Ils me laissent ici pour reflechir, pour contempler. C'est le plus penible de tout les evenements de ce passe torture et torturant, insouvenable et inoubliable. C'est, aujourd'hui le 14 du Mois d'Aout.

C'est aujourd'hui, il y soissante ans, que ma mere a etee convoyee a Auschwitz de Drancy, camp de deportation, situe a une dixaines de kilometres nord de Paris. Le convoi numero 19 a emporte neuf cent nonante et un Juifs choisis et enleves de Rivesaltes, par ordre et la bonne volonte du gouvernement de Vichy-France. D'apres Serge Klarsfeld, les convois avais commences a rouler en Mars ou Avril 1942¹.

At about that time, March 1942, I was being prepared to leave St.Raphael, in Southern France, to be sent to the U. S. A. with 49 other refugee children. My own resistance to knowing just exactly what happened, has prevented me from remembering this exact date of August 14, even though I had learned of it many years earlier, had

recorded it in a special place but have not been able to remember where, and was therefore unable to hold on to this terrible date until this past July when the letter from Mme. Serge Klarsfeld's informed me of the exact details here recorded.

Now I have it inscribed in several obvious rather than special places that my mother was sent to Auschwitz in Convoy No. 19, August 14, 1942. But I have painfully realized that it does not tell me the exact day or even if she was sent to the gas-chamber. She might have even been sent to a labor camp; she was in good health though starving, as we all were. I still have to mobilize myself and find out the absolute day. No doubt it is recorded somewhere; both the Germans and the Poles seem to have kept records. I would guess it was August 16 or who knows how much longer after. I'll say more about this later. On August 14, 1942, I had been in America for about 4 months.

Ten days ago of this writing, outside of Paris, at the *Camp de Drancy, Les Fils et Filles des Deportés Juifs de France* (the organization, The Sons and Daughters of Deported Jews from France) commemorated on its 60th anniversary, the departure from

¹ August 14, 2002. We are in Wellfleet, MA. Rachel, Erik, Karl, Joshua, their wives and children have gone out, to explore around and play at a nearby a lake. They have left me here to think, to contemplate. This is the most painful of the events of this tortured and torturing past, unrememberable and unforgettable. Today is the 14th of August. It is today, 60 years ago, that my mother was sent to Auschwitz from Drancy, a deportation camp situated about 10 kilometers north of Paris. Convoy number 19 transported nine hundred and ninety one Jews selected and plucked from Rivesaltes, by order and the good will of the government of Vichy-France. According to Serge Klarsfeld, the convoys started to roll in March or April 1942.

Drancy of convoy No. 19 for Auschwitz. At noontime, the names of the deportees were read by those who survived or by their children. I wanted to be there; I wanted to read my mother's name aloud. I learned about this commemoration in June! We were informed so late that to plan such a trip at this time, Rachel and I would have had to turn our established summer plans upside down. These plans require much collaboration among 4 families due to variable constraints imposed by busy schedules, in order to make possible our highly prized ritual week in Cape Cod vacationing all together, Rachel and I with our 3 sons and their young families. Rachel and I will go to participate in such commemoration next year. That requires planning and inquiry. I have not kept up with my French sufficiently to understand with certainty Mme Klarsfeld's rather formal and "sophisticated" language. Regrettable that she writes for the well-spoken, elegant French. Don't they realize over there that those of us who left France many years ago may have difficulty reading formal letter-writing French! We, the few of us outside of France want to be able to read what she has written! Chalk up my first complaint, a very minor one.

Is that what is really troubling me? Klarsfeld clearly writes that the commemorations will continue for the next two years. There will be commemorations until July 31, 2004, the date when the last convoy, No. 77, 60 years ago took 300 children to Auschwitz, a convoy referred to by Klarsfeld on several occasions.

I feel my lack of involvement in the group processes that abound, in Philadelphia, in New York, Washington, in the U. S., and in France. In part I have not wanted to burden my family with such involvement. But I have not been very pressed to do so myself. Now and then, I feel that I would like to be involved in some ongoing proceedings, reunions, professional symposia, symposia at the Holocaust Museum in

DC or at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem. But I don't act on that wish. I turn instead to my prevention work, to that part of my work committed to push for the prevention of other holocausts, to what mental health professionals think is pertinent to it and especially to what comes before it, that sets the stage for it and motivates humans toward it. So, even as I write this, again, I will now turn to my prevention work, and will later talk with Rachel about going to France in 2003 to participate in such a commemoration, perhaps in May when I have to be in Italy.

Je suis Henri Parens, a present j'ai l'age de 73 ans. Mon nom de famille avant l'age de 25 ans etait Henri Pruszinowski. Voici, brievement mon histoire concernant la partie de ma vie que les Nazis mon voles. Mais, je vous prie de comprendre: la partie de ma vie qu'on m'as vole n'est pas seulement une question de temps, d'annees entre 1940 et 1942². Yes, those two years were robbed of what they would have been, in Bruxelles, my mother and I, my mother working 12 hours a day if not more; I in school, committed to learning from way back. The part of my life of which they robbed me, has continued to this day, sixty years later. With the help of many good people I filled my life with very fortunate details, rich details, details that make life—my wife, my sons and all they bring with them now—my education, my work, and the lesser details that enrich the more vital details. But the continuation of my early life, the first 10

² I am Henri Parens, presently I am 73 years old. My name before I was 25 was Henri Pruszinowski. Here briefly, is my story pertaining to that part of my life the Nazis stole from me. But, please understand: the part of my life they stole is not simply a question of time, of the years between 1940 and 1942.

years of it, has been cut off; a large part of my beginnings has not continued. My life with my mother, with my family in Bruxelles, my life in Bruxelles has been cut off—except for what I have continued of it inside.

It is strange. What I have lived since 1942 has been rich, rewarding, I would not be without it. But there's a hole, an empty something. And every now and then, on anniversaries, on occasions, on receiving mailings, on seeing a film (old or new) or looking again at some television program that details that time or that situation, it grabs me. I want to share it with Rachel and with my sons; but I don't want to burden them with it more. Each of them has lived it enough already, carries it in mind too much of the time. Enough is enough.

For me, it's never enough. I need to continue to work it through, continue to try to metabolize what caused that emptiness, to heal that hole. What I know so far tells me I'll never get to the end of it; it's endless. I just continue to live with it, and heal as best I can. Self-analyzing helps, enjoying what I do have helps—and that is enormous, enormously good—and so does doing my work in helping patients make better lives for themselves and in pushing for the prevention of traumatization of children, and of personal and social violence and malignant prejudice.

My mother's name is Rosa Pruszinowska. She was born in Lodz, Poland. She died when she was about 38 years of age. I was then 13, and very far away from her.

My father's name is Isaach Biederman. He was born in Lodz, Poland, and still lived there when the Germans invaded Poland in September 1939. My estimation is that he was probably less than 40 years of age. I am now, belatedly searching for what happened to him. To date I do not know. But my presumption has been that he fell

victim to the Nazis. My uncertainty comes from the fact, as I have recently learned, that not all Jews in the Lodz Ghetto were exterminated. Some made it out.

My only brother, Emanuel Biederman, probably 3 or 4 years older than I, lived with my father. His fate was probably, but again, not certainly, linked to that of my father.

Of a large family, both my mother and father had a number of siblings, when I returned in Bruxelles in 1953, three cousins were left. None of us has found, to date, anyone other than my three cousins and me.

All I can say to explain the differences in my mother and my father's names is that my parents were divorced before my mother migrated to Bruxelles when I was very young. Why she resumed her maiden name, and why my family name was hers and not my father's, and why she did not also bring my brother Emanuel with us, to these questions I have no answer.

Here I am, a psychiatrist-psychoanalyst, age 73-74, still deeply pained by what happened so many years ago. I am not surprised; this is how it works; you get traumatized when you're young, it's for life, for some more, for some less. But, it's ever-present, for life. So much so that I have not . . . done so many things I could have done, about what happened. Foremost, why did I not search for the whereabouts of my mother, my brother and my father, until recent years? I search to answer this. I do know that my answer has a bearing on why it took survivors so long to speak out about their Holocaust experience.

Here I am, committed to understand my patients, and always at hand is understanding myself, and I don't understand so much of my behavior in this regard. Well, maybe that's too strong. I understand a good deal of it. I will take that up later.

What happened to us was horrible. More horrible for many than me. It makes one weep, silently, tearlessly, to think of the many people, who even today, are subjected to the searing wounds left by persecution, family destruction, incarceration, violation—sexual and other—the list of psyche wounding injuries is long. Ethnic cleansings, death to Jews, Non-Arians, Niggers, Infidels, Communists, Nationalists, Anythings other than what we are! The curse of conflicts between ethnic neighbors, religious neighbors, land neighbors, commonly facilitated by group dynamics is found in too many parts of the world. Miserable disease in so many neighboring species that passes for the survival of the fittest. Yet, the Holocaust stands out by the way it was not just governmentally sanctioned, but ordered, legalized, planned, carried out at the end of a rifle by the hands of the law, in a land long known to be a center of highest learning, academic, scientific, literary, artistic, a center of advancing civilization. The progressive advancing of laws stripping away rights to work, to walk in the streets, permitting harassment, beatings, burning of synagogues, destruction of property, one after another eventually leading to individual and group violations, incarceration in concentration camps, degradation, and for so many eventually programmed chemical death, then pits of ashes and dead bodies. From healthy thriving human beings, many factors went into our dehumanization, our robotization, our giving up, as happened to so many among us. Wanton, constant, humiliation and physical abuse, threat of death, incarceration, starvation, hygienic and sanitary degradation, so many tortures, became too much to bear. The way we were treated led many from misery to body-mind-numbing, to robotization into *Muselmann*. The pain such abuse *in extremis* brings has its own nature. Though in many of us it did not destroy self-esteem, self-regard, self-value, the leaden pain it leaves stays for life. It aches, it saddens, it mourns, it quietly

rages. It depresses some. But it did not and does not obliterate “me” or those I love more than myself.

We lived through it, many of us. Too many did not. For those of us who did, life went on, strange how in all that misery it went on.

Life went on, throughout, life went on.

Why weep?

Because it hurts.

Why rage?

Because it hurts too much.

Why write?

In hope of being heard say

It hurt, it still hurts too much.

To not weep all the time.

To bear witness.

“I swear to tell the truth . . .”

CHAPTER 2

THE GERMANS ATTACK BELGIUM . . . OUR EXODUS

10 May, 1940

It was a lovely bright morning when we were wakened. They probably used a mild-toned bell and probably added their voices to waken those who didn't waken as readily as some of us did. It must've been my turn to empty the usual night pot we used to avoid going the long distance to the toilet facilities during the night. I really did not mind since we took turns at it. It was sunny. It was after all May and like here in the States, in Belgium May is bright and sunny.

After a few minutes of being awake I noted the sound of thuds, muffled, in clusters. Unusual sounds. Like some dead weights, big things, falling without subsequent resonance. "Thud!" The sound seemed to come from far away though I couldn't guess from how far or from where it was coming. Other than that, things seemed really quite usual. The morning waking routine was usual; some milling around like you can expect with some forty kids moving about in one dorm as they get going. We were in summer camp already for a few days, though it was only the beginning of May, actually as I have learned from the history books, it was 10 May 1940. I had been at this camp before and had no objection to being there, though I would have preferred to stay in Bruxelles (Brussels). The city schools were already out for the summer vacation.

It's while we were eating our *petit dejeuner* (breakfast) that we were suddenly told to hurry up, finish our *dejeuner*, that we all had to go back to Bruxelles. The rush

set in, the tone encouraging to hurry was unusual, I don't recall any protest by the kids. Back in the dormitory we each packed out things, the younger kids no doubt being helped by the camp staff, milling around pulling things together, we were actually ready fairly quickly. Asking what was going on didn't get us much information, it's as though the staff were not to tell us, we'd find out when we got home. Nonetheless, the tone was urgent and our exodus from the "summer camp" went fairly expeditiously taking into consideration that we were a bunch of kids, some younger than I.

It was 10 May 1940. For me, a profoundly memorable day. It would be the first of this for-always unique series of memorable days in my life, days that for the most part coincided with the sequel of memorable days that trace the progress of World War II. I tag 10 May 1940 as the first of those memorable days that trace the trailing off of the life I had been born into. When we got back to Bruxelles, we were received by near-frenzy parents, people milling again, palpably more driven than usual. My mother seemed unusually stressed out. I was 11, I asked my mother, in Yiddish, our family way of talking to each other, "*Ma, wus passiert?*" ("Ma, what's going on?"). "*Les Boches ont attaques la Belgique. Ar'n, wier müssen weg gehen*" ("The Germans have attacked Belgium. Aron—my Yiddish name—we have to leave").

The next few days were troubling. For me, the tenor of the time was disquieting, nearly alarming. The grown-ups who understood what was going on seemed alarmed. Without understanding, I felt it too; it was contagious. My mother and I went from one family cluster of our extended family in Bruxelles to another. The reason, my mother told me, was to find out what they were going to do, as if, what they were going to do would decide what we would do with any of them or by ourselves. Most troubling for me, and I guess for her, was that she seemed to walk away from each

encounter increasingly downcast, disappointed and, though she did pretty well in trying to hide it from me, I knew she was frightened. My mother, I know now, was not one to get frenzied; she kept a leash on her fear. But we were all frightened; the grownups were frightened; I felt the fear but not as if it were mine, it surrounded us. I'm not sure that I was, yet. I didn't know the consequences that might lie ahead for us. I came to sort out that in addition to her deciding what she and I would do, she had also been trying to get anyone of them to lend her some money. My impression is that she did not succeed. But why did she do this now, try to borrow money? For what? I soon found out. To get out of Belgium.

I should say here, that I speak of "my mother and I" because by this time in our family history, my mother and father had for some years been divorced and lived in different lands. I was born in Lodz, Poland in December 1928. When I was about 3 to 5 years of age, my mother and I came to Bruxelles. My parents, as I said, were then already divorced. I can only speculate on why my mother left my older brother Emanuel with our family in Lodz and why she left Poland at all. It has long been painful for me that my childhood family of four split this way, and especially that my mother left my brother in Lodz. I can only assume that she believed it would be impossible for her to take care of two young children in a new country—she did not yet speak French—and that our large family in Lodz would most likely provide Emanuel with better care than she could while she was coping with migration. I don't know what factors entered into her making this decision. Perhaps it was a compromise made by people naïve in what affects children detrimentally. As a Child Psychiatrist-Psychoanalyst, I doubt that the decision was a good one. This was around 1932. A substantial part of our Polish family had already migrated to Bruxelles during the early

1900s, for the usual reasons that Jews left Russia and Poland then—the harsher maltreatment of Jews in Eastern Europe as compared to Western Europe, with their reputed pogroms. Antisemitism, quite more malignant in Europe than in America, was harsher in Eastern than in West Europe. In Bruxelles, I lived through no pogrom. I was well acquainted though with that common phrase, “*Sales Juifs*”, Dirty Jews, that besmirched an occasional wall. Still fortunately, Belgian antisemitism was no match for the Polish-Russian brand. In addition, there were better life opportunities and living circumstances in Western Europe. One of the problems I have resulting from what followed from 10 May 1940 is that I have no one left to fill in some of the details of my family history; I am obliged to speculate. I just don’t know why my parents divorced—one complaint I overheard from my mother was that my father had become a compulsive gambler, card-player, a Jewish plague among some then. Nor do I really know why my mother decided to migrate to Bruxelles when I was just 3 or 4 or 5, probably closer to 3 than 5. I do know, because my memory does go back to that time: that my mother was a seamstress who worked with my Aunt Esther in a joint business they had of mass-producing, that is of making boys’ clothing out of rolls of cloth—I can see them cutting cloth stretched out on a table and ingeniously sewing pieces of cloth into clothing. I gather from their productions that these were sold to a merchant who then distributed them to stores. My mother did so to near the time when the Germans invaded Belgium. Anyway, this is why I speak of “My mother and I” and not, sadly, “My parents, my brother Emanuel and I”.

In Chaos We Leave Bruxelles for France.

Within two weeks, my mother had decided; we packed what we could carry. We were leaving Bruxelles; we left much behind. We walked to *La Gare du Midi* (South Station) to get away. That train station was just about six blocks from where we lived. Over the years I have assumed that we did not have the financial means to try to go to England, so France was the only direction open to us. I also learned later that the Belgians, the French and who know who else believed to France had an army that could withstand the advancing Germans and so it made sense to go there. I never got a chance to really ask my mother why we did what we did. I didn't know enough to ask then. And I think I knew when to not ask questions; not that my mother would reject or be disinterested in my asking. It's that I trusted my mother and knew from our past history, that she trusted me to behave like a responsible kid. I was.

La Gare due Midi was bewildering. I had seen the station before, but it was never like this. People were pouring in; there was a steady flow of people coming into the station. Nothing seemed to stand still. Even the steaming locomotive seemed on the go. The milling that I had been seeing of late now was frenzied. Unheard of, no tickets were needed to board the train; no destinations were indicated; by word of mouth, this train was going to France. The train seemed just ready to go, urging people to get in. People were squeezing in, grabbing seats. My mother and I settled in two, our meager baggage somewhere. The seat-searchers looked about, frightened, bags, suitcases in hand, children latched onto or carried. I watched them; I watched, observed even when I was younger. I was troubled by the distress all around. Soon we all seemed to settle in; I don't recall anyone standing in our wagon. It was not long before the train left. I was riveted to the window. Just like that, we left my family, my home,

my school, my hometown. I had no thought of goodbye or of not seeing them very soon again; we just left.

We were running. Why? I had never been called “*Sale Juif*”, Dirty Jew. But graffiti, especially malignant graffiti, was not invented in America. A wall near the house in which we lived had added to my education about antisemitism. Even in Bruxelles, my hometown, one of the commonly seen graffiti themes was “Sales Juifs” with a few additional nasty words. But I didn’t know then, in early May 1940 that this really was the reason my mother decided that we had to leave immediately. I can only guess that while I had not seen a pogrom in Bruxelles, my mother probably had in Poland. She never talked to me about that. I have no idea whether my aunts and uncles and cousins left Bruxelles or stayed. Of course, I have thought that my mother probably had heard, as all Jews had—except us kids—of *Kristallnacht*, of Hitler’s ravings and threats to European Jewry.

We stopped at Tournai—it may have been Courtray—a step from the Belgian-French border, for longer than one would have thought it we were in such a hurry to get out of Belgium. To check passports? No passports we needed. Tickets were not needed. This was war. It seemed more as if those in charge of the train had to orient and determine which avenue we would take into France. Once across the border into France we turned east toward Lille; further on was Dunkerque. Somewhere near Lille or Dunkerque we began to hear those “thud-clusters” again but they now seemed much closer this time than the first time I had heard them. Sensing danger this time, I asked my mother what that sound was. Protectively, over-protectively—I was 11!—she told me not to worry, that it was only thunder. “*Drole de tonnerre*”, funny thunder, I thought. I knew she was trying to prevent my fear. Soon though we heard the loud air-

splitting humming roar of airplanes, sounding threateningly near. The train screeching, slowed with urgency. We were told to immediately get off the train. The train stopped in the middle of nowhere; we hurriedly got off, and following instructions, we took cover some hundred yards from the train. As we crouched behind a mound of ground I did not again ask my mother what the “thuds” were; I accepted her earlier prevarication sensing she was doing so hoping I would not realize our hazardous predicament; of course she would have been troubled by my talking about it now. Sure she looked out for me, but I also looked out for her. I knew they were bombs. None came anywhere near where we were. As the sound of the planes passed beyond us, we were urged to re-embark and hurried to do so.

Soon we were again on the way. I had not the slightest idea where we were going; but so long as I was with my mother and we were not alone, that was OK with me; not that I had any choice. I too was of the mind, “*Allons, foutons l’camp!*”, Let’s get out of here, fast! We traveled south. By mid-afternoon we seemed to be moving increasingly more slowly, with a number of in the middle of nowhere stops. We seemed to just be going through countryside, no large cities. It was May. It was beautiful here too, the French *campagne*, fields and villages. At times we were crawling. As I think of it now, I would assume that those driving the train were in communication with their headquarters deciding what to do with this trainload of refugees from Bruxelles who were seeking asylum, just about anywhere in France, anywhere away from the advancing Germans. From the train crawlings and stops I can imagine now that they just did not expect us and did not altogether know where to send us, where to put us up. I can see, and have many times before realized that the French were not prepared—why should they have been—for this sudden in-pouring of its

northern neighbors. No one expected the German invasion to proceed with such rapidity. *Blitzkrieg*, all right; or as William Shirer noted *Sitzkrieg*—sitting war—on the part of the French and their European allies. By the time our elders had come to see the lightning-speed with which the Germans disposed of Poland, I assume that it was too late to get ready for handling lightning-speed events. It's amply clear to me that not only were we a burdensome challenge for the French, but that we gave them quite a headache. What to do with all these foreigners at a time when France now was under threat of siege by the blitzing Germans. No one had anticipated our arrival. Not that they should have, given that the French *Maginot Line*—which the German war strategy essentially rendered impotent—was invincible!

At this time, I believe that the French were well disposed toward us; actually they were quite generous. At times when the train stopped, people from the environs brought us food. I guess our arrival had been transmitted by radio, the most common means then for being *au courant* of the unfolding war. These gifts of food were most welcome since we had not eaten since we left Bruxelles, mid-morning. As the afternoon wore on, and darkness was obviously not far away, the train came to a stop, seemingly again, in the middle of nowhere, but I soon noticed that we were near a village. We were told to disembark from the train and follow those in front of us. We were led, a slow moving mass of family clusters toward a sizable village, larger than I had thought, like a very small town. We knew we would spend the night here; we did, in barns and anywhere where people could be made comfortable enough, on straw especially, to sleep this night. Some sedatives no doubt would have helped a great deal. They did feed us; no one that I know, paid. Again I say, much generosity was extended

us by totally unknown sympathetic French villagers, and I now guess probably by some organization mobilized and intent on doing this kind of service for humanity.

The next day, my guess is that following plans evidently drawn up by some night-working French government people, social agencies, volunteers, and who knows who, we were destined for a village that I construe was in the environs south of Perigeux, somewhat north of Toulouse. I see no way that I would succeed were I to try to find that village now. Although I did have a sense that this was a temporary asylum, other than for some of the strains that come with being refugees in a time of war, our stay at this village was actually quite good.

Summer 1940 – In a French Village

It can't access in memory how we got to the Village—I am capitalizing Village as though it were its name. I do remember the Village, but not its name or specific geographic location. The Village consisted really of one “street” or road along which, on both sides there were houses. Some were simply village-houses; others were actual farms. I recall that midway but closer to the other end of the Village from where we stayed, there was a water pump that served the whole village. We all got the water we needed there. And I do remember fetching water, hand pumping it into our bucket and walking back to our place with some feeling of being useful. My mother and I lived in a loving “*entente cordiale*”, in cordial agreement; besides the fact that she and I were easily affectionate, I had already long agreed, without any verbal or written pact, to do what my mother asked me or told me to do without fuss. She was very reasonable in what she expected me to do and when she expected me to do it; and I only once objected to what she asked of me. The noteworthy thing is that my not doing what she

expected of me was so rare that I remember the one time I did not. I didn't want to do a chore in the service of my very spoiled and annoying cousin Joseph—my younger cousin Joseph, not my older cousin Joseph who I loved being with—and much to my mother's befuddlement, this was highly unusual for us, I held to my refusal even with her repeated request. She was not happy with me on that occasion; but it did blow over fairly soon. I want to emphasize that my doing what my mother expected of me was not out of fear. I don't recall ever being afraid of her or, of anything she did. It's just that we really got along; we really loved and respected each other; and we each knew we could count on the other. I could say more about our relationship but this is not the place for it.

I remember somewhat, the house we stayed in, in Village; it was not a farm house but rather simply a stone village house. I can see the ground-level set of rooms we were in, especially the main center of our activity, the kitchen and eating-place; the ground floor (a simple cement floor), a substantial wood burning stove, a table and several chairs. Several other families had also been quartered in the Village, one of which we seemed to occasionally spend some time with. Their daughter was the only other foreign child about my age.

At first, given the modest monetary resources my mother had made it possible for us to eat quite simply but amply. One of the activities we undertook together, my mother of course being in charge, was to make butter. I was fascinated by the fact that by treating whole milk in a prescribed manner, namely by shaking it gently but steadfastly for quite some time in a container one could easily enough get into, the milk would separate out into a fairly dense layer of cream and a fat-thinned coalescing mass of milk residue. This first part, the cream, was shaken or stirred further, patiently, at

times tediously, and got more dense and butter-like. The latter part was poured into a cloth sack, the liquid-coalescing mass would get squeezed out and was discarded but the remains in the sack would, after one or two days sitting in the sack would become “*du fromage blanc*”, white cheese curds. It was not the first time that I was impressed with my mother’s cleverness. Nor was it the first nor the last time that I wondered where in the world my mother got to know these things. I saw no evidence of her acquiring the information; I just saw that she knew it.

By the way, the house in which we stayed, and for which I believe we paid no rent—whether out of sheer French peasants’ generosity or paid for minimally no doubt by the French government—was occupied by one woman older than my mother. I did not see much of her; nor evidently was she particularly interested in having anything to do with an 11 year-old. But across the road from where we stayed there was a farm with an animal barn fairly close to the road, and a farming family that seemed to welcome my curiosity and occasional wandering there. I found it pleasant to be there, in the courtyard and in that barn; the odor, the chickens pecking the ground, the sound of hens and roosters, the couple horses and the cows; I liked that. After a couple months of being in Village and visiting the farm I learned a then most fascinating fact of nature. Well, I knew that all animals have sex to make babies; but I had not yet, by that time thought or envisioned how cows and bulls might do it. Wow! How did that bull lift himself to get his monstrous torso onto her back? And what a member! I remember being concerned that the poor cow was going to get crushed by that enormous bull mounted on her rear end. She survived it all right.

My wanderings on the farm paid off in yet another way. I can’t remember who really ran or managed the farm. This was wartime, and it is very likely that the young

men who belonged to that farm, assuming there were some, were in the military. I am inclined to believe that one or two older men and several women ran the farm and did all it needed to keep going. But when it came time to harvest the strawberries they had planted, they needed some additional work-hands. Since I was a capable-enough looking boy, they offered me a few “*sous*” (French pennies) to help them pick their strawberries, and some strawberries to take home as well. When I checked with her, my mother had no objection, and so I was hired. The harvest was not large and the few of us who did it, sufficed to finish the job in a few days.

But our strawberries did not last long enough. A new dimension of change was progressively making itself felt. Food was beginning to get increasingly scarce. Where the food was going, whether it was not being produced at the rate sufficient to feed the villagers—and probably elsewhere in France too—or whether most of it was requisitioned for those actively engaged in the war, what ever the cause or causes, it became more and more difficult to get our usual food supply. This applied both to what and to how much was accessible to us. It became necessary to do some scavenging. I never had needed to go about scavenging for food before, and certainly was not exercised in taking what belonged to someone else. Nor, to the best of my knowledge, was my mother. But we were getting hungry. What to do? Whatever, how? How it came to be decided, I don’t know. But I do know that I was enlisted to pick up some edibles that could be found in the farmed fields and fruit trees surrounding the Village. Children grabbing fruit from trees is probably one of those nasty things farmers everywhere struggle with. Especially in increasingly lean days as these. Still, hunger was beginning to preoccupy our free time and drive us to what I hope humankind would consider minor thievery in increasingly dire times. I am speaking of that part of

humankind I consider deserving of this designation, though I know that, that other part of it, the part I would like to disclaim, is part of “humankind” too. But in times as these, I guess the principle that “All’s fair in love and war” could be stretched to accommodate our dilemma. I did not feel good about filching food from the villagers who were really quite generously offered us asylum in Village. Furthermore, they were feeling the gnawing of insufficient food as much as we were. No, I didn’t like doing this. But it made sense that we kids—a girl about my age whose family was displaced into Village like we were and I—would be asked, not commanded, by our elders to do this illicit stuff for the good of all of us. Isn’t it so that on ships in time of war, stealing food can be fatal? But maybe the rules would not be as violently applied to kids. Also, we were of an age that we probably were more agile than our elders and could more easily evade getting caught; smart kids can outsmart grown ups in bushes most anytime.

Though looking for ripe-enough and even not-so-ripe apples, pears, berries, cherries and some leguminous vegetables was our prime effort, stealing potatoes—since it was a brilliant idea, it must’ve been my mother’s—was one of the things that presented itself as the most desirable of possibilities. Of course, potatoes are also regarded as more basic food staple and were therefore more hazardous to steal. Interestingly, even to this day, I find potatoes among the most gratifying of foods; I’m probably one among many. I tended to go on these food hunts with this girl whose name I can’t remember. So potatoes is what we would go for today. We knew exactly where to go because we had, nonchalantly you might say, surveyed our possibilities. In this enterprise we faced two problems in addition to the usual ones of stealing farmers’ produce. First, was that stealing fruit from low-lying tree branches or bushes, or quickly scooping some vegetable lying on the ground could be done in the blink of an

eye; but snitching potatoes takes some doing. Potatoes don't grow on trees; time is needed to get them in hand. We were not intent on destroying the plants, just to lift them aside sufficiently to be able to take a few of its bellied tubers, and drop the plant back in its bed so that it might replace what we had snitched. I guess that even in expert hands this task takes a bit of time. And second, which was rendered more important by the first, is that generally potato fields are wide open; and this one was especially so and being right next to one of the main roads to Village made us visible even from some distance. In this instance, the beautiful countryside was not on our side.

Whether these difficulties were what made the event so memorable that I can see it today or what happened in the process, I'm not sure. Probably all of it. I recall that our venturing out on this expedition made me more frightened than the ones we had undertaken before. With the earlier ones I think we were more scared by the fact that we were "good kids" doing "bad" things, stealing food when everyone was increasingly coming to know hunger; we were not dummies, we knew others were hungry too. You get to know these things by the time you're 11, especially in times like these, some things you learn fast. But this time we were additionally afraid because our chances of being found out were much greater than before, we had no idea of what the consequences of our being caught might be. Nonetheless, probably bolstering each other—our parents did not push us to it—we proceeded, armed with as ample pockets as we could muster to carry our snatch home with as little obvious visibility as possible. We did not want to move directly into the field from the main road; we would be most visible from there. We selected a spot on a small dirt path that ran from the main road along the left side of the field. As we approached our site we scouted it for any sign of human presence. As if just admiring Mother Nature's work, we selected and agreed on

our spot within feet of the path, and seeing no sign of human life whatsoever, we quickly rushed to a cluster of potato plants. I gently enough tilted a couple plants to their side with one hand, our fingers searching for and pulling out some substantially sized potatoes, rushed them into our pockets, afraid all the while that somehow we would be seen. We were not mistaken. Suddenly, from within a tool hut we assumed to be empty, ambled out a somewhat older man, armed with a tool in each hand, arms raised, waving these and calling out curses and threats and rushing at us as best he could. We did not consider his agility, his age, or anything else for that matter; we just ran like hell, encumbered only by the bounty bulging our pockets. Now our running was really sped up by fear, not so much by the chance of the man catching us, since our thieving spot was on the other side of the field from where the tool hut was located and we were sure that we ran faster than he could. We ran scared because we had been seen stealing potatoes from the fields in this time of growing hunger, because it would not be difficult to know that we were not Village kids but those foreigners, and we anticipated dire humiliation and troubles this would bring to our families. As predicted, we escaped and ran like hell, home. As we unloaded our pockets, with anxious excitement we told our parents how we nearly got caught, with details kids thrive on. Even though our loot was not large we were well received at home. This probably mitigated some the fear and shame I felt at having stolen food from these Villagers, who were sheltering us in their own homes! I liked the villagers; none had been unwelcoming, until this morning, when that reasonably angry farmer probably wished we had never come to his village. Fortunately, though the robbed farmer probably circulated the story of our thievery, no repercussions came to our families from it. Maybe we were not the only ones who were scavenging for food.

The grown-up villagers accepted us; perhaps at some point they may have experienced us as a nuisance, as no doubt did that hapless farmer. But the kids welcomed us; at least I felt so. I recall two young teenagers with whom I formed some kind of friendship. Really nice kids. I remember best our going to their favorite swim hole. Each had bicycles; I of course did not. But never mind, the older of the two, probably 14, just arranged some way for me to ride on the bike with him, usually side saddle on the bike frame in front of him. It was really a breath-taking ride down the large hill on a macadamized road that crossed the other end of the village—near where the strawberry field was located. The ride was glorious down that long hill through two rows of tall majestic poplar trees—they grow tall in Village—then as the ground leveled, the road curved to the right opening to view lush bushes and fields. Yet perhaps more memorable than the majestic poplar trees were the songs these guys sang as we flew down this hill, “*Vas-y Leon, tappe sur le bouchon. Une partie impetante, ca fait plaisir, tu la vus c’est un amande, change to tire....*” (“Go to it Leon, hit on the cork. An rash party, that brings pleasure; you’ve seen it’s an almond, change your aim....”) Although even to this day I never completely understood the lyrics, I definitely had the sense that here we were riding down this beautiful hill, singing some age-appropriate salacious song about drinking and screwing. After all, I was 11; it was duly topical and correct language for our well-programmed adolescent interests.

Speaking about sex and my 11 year-old mind, sometime during these three summer months, another event stands out in my mind. As I was walking back to Village from one of my occasional meanderings who did I see on the road walking toward me but my mother and some French sailor I’d never seen before. Wow, where did he come from? And how was it that my mother seemed on rather chummy terms

with him? We greeted each other, my mother introducing us, and we each went our way, I toward the village, my mother and her sailor-friend the other way. For some reason, I didn't ask my mother who this was, how they met, or what they were up to. Frankly, I just imagined innocence, no doubt pushing aside many indiscreet thoughts. Mh. My mother was after all long unmarried. But I guess it's those indiscreet repressed thoughts that make this memory quite vivid for me.

I was not aware then that our stay in Village would soon be over. In the first days of September 1940, we were informed that the foreigners housed in the village were going to be transferred to, who knows where. I found out that we were going to a specified destination in Toulouse and that we would be transported there, courtesy of the Vichy-France government. The war was well over, Petain having called for an armistice with the bulldozing German army on June 17, 1940. It did not take long for Hitler's government to begin to make demands of the unoccupied zone defeated French to start the round up of Jews there.

CHAPTER 3

THE CAMPS

The Round-Up

I have no memory of just when in mid-September we were rounded up, or how many of us in the village were in that round up. Why this round up anyway? Because we were foreigners? After all, no one had invited us here. We just barged in from Belgium, running away from the Germans. Were they relocating us to a situation where our elders could get work and us kids go to school? I had seen no sign of school in Village. But where? My mother did not know. When we left Bruxelles, we decided to leave. We did not decide to leave Village. They decided, whoever “they” were. I can’t recall how we were transported to Toulouse. I do know that from Village, with no train station nearby, my mother and I had no means of getting ourselves to Toulouse. Besides, where is Toulouse and where in Toulouse? Hell, we didn’t know where we were to go. Although, with my mother, you couldn’t tell; she knew all kinds of things. “They” took us there. I do know it was not by train. By *autobus*? I would assume that. Looking back, it was luxurious to not feel alone; I was with my mother, no matter where we were going, I was not alone; my mother was there. It was more the anxiety floating around us, the worried faces that engendered fear. Thank heaven, I was not alone. I was not ready to be alone, not at the doorstep to hell.

I remember what the passage into hell looked like. In Toulouse, our first Camp, was a Detention Camp. Inside the barracks it was gray, all gray. The gray made us all look even more haggard than we felt; what a dismal looking bunch of people around

me. Maybe it was not just the light; yes, it was gray in there; but it was us. Those around me looked so haggard, and I guess worried, afraid. These worried faces informed me that we were heading for difficult times. Grown ups are a headache sometimes, but I knew they were not dumb. I had my mother and a number of uncles and aunts who informed me of that, especially my mother. My mother, as always, tried to protect me from the dread around us. She was quite a woman, this woman, my mother. I won't say all I feel about that, about her.

The barracks in the middle of Toulouse were dark, gray, double bunked beds made of, I guess the universal 2 by 4s, coarse army blanket, and of course, no sheets. They were probably straw filled "mattresses", a preview of what we would get later. What a grim crowd we made. I don't remember how or what they fed us those two or three days we were there. Nor do I remember how we were transported to our next stop, Ricibidou.

Ricibidou – Welcome to Your First Concentration Camp.

Ricibidou was situated some 10 kilometers from Toulouse. By its construction, no doubt, Ricibidou was a permanent camp; probably a military post. The barracks were of brick—that is, they were there for the duration, had been there for some time, though not ages because they looked of fairly recent vintage; they were built to be there for some time to come. That's where Vichy-France's government wanted us to be. Funny relief on entry here; the place wasn't so scary or distressing; though we were incarcerated, foreigners imprisoned, it was not dirty gray like the entryway barracks in Toulouse.

We got there in late September. I must have been conditioned to be in school at this time of the year, the season with its weather and all that; it was odd not to be in school. I do not remember befriending anyone in Ricibidou; there were no kids my age in my barrack. So idleness was beginning to set in. I liked school; I felt good in school. But there was no school. Obviously, I was not the only one to take note of that. Somehow, who knows how, the grown-ups thought of it too. What were kids doing out of school at this time of year? And giving them due credit, they, our “they” this time, probably thought “We don’t want our kids not studying and learning”. I can’t explain it, but many parents are like that; some more, some less. With Jews, everybody knows that studying, Torah or anything, well maybe not just anything, anyway, studying, learning, is very, very important. Whatever the thinking, within I would guess a month, we began to have some form of school; we had to go to classes. The classes were few, a couple hours at a time, the one-classroom-school type, and we did not meet everyday.

Not only that; our “they” also began to organize yet other activities for us. Whether my mother’s doing or my own, I saw to it that I joined in: “The Israelite Boy Scouts”. I don’t remember what we did. It probably was salutary for us. I know, I felt my machismo—at 11 years of age, it’s really OK for boys to feel they’re tough and stuff—enhanced by being a Boy Scout. In fact, I felt so strong that I recall going to a gathering, and juiced up by my enthusiasm for the venture—after all, we were Boy Scouts!—as I bounded along, I came across the small stream that ran through the Ricibidou camp, a stream there about 6 to 8 feet across; I was bounding along. When I came to the stream, of course I could just leap from one side of it to the other. So there I went, flying in the air, falling square on the very muddy other side of the little stream, missing my mark by about two feet. Embarrassed at my shortfall, I quickly got myself

upright, stepped out of the mud, to find that I came up one shoe missing. Good heavens, I almost lost my shoe. It was the only pair I had. We had traveled light. I retrieved it out of the muck, really only mud but it did feel like muck, and crestfallen or brought back to where we really were, I proceeded at a much slowed pace to the troop meeting. I cannot remember one thing that transpired there. The weight of my humiliation at not having cleared that little stream brought me back to “Ricibidou”. That’s where we were; that’s all I was, a detainee or whatever in this unwished-for place.

Idleness was not fully remedied by the few occasional classes we had—I can’t remember what the classes were in, no doubt Language and Math—or by the Boy Scouts. I don’t know why or how it came about that I had or made no friends in Ricibidou; this was unusual for me; I always had one or two quite good friends, even in Village where I stayed only a bit more than two months. In Bruxelles and beyond, I always had one or two close friends and several a more peripheral ones, if I can put it that way. Then I think, the idleness, no doubt, was intensified by my having no close peers with whom to get into some diversionary time-occupying activity. Amazing how even to an 11-year-old approaching 12, idleness can be a problem. Both adults and kids were, I guess, trying to dissolve the idleness. I should emphasize that the adults were idle too, not just us kids; this was not a labor camp; slavery might be better than idleness. Well, I would not go that far. It was a just-holding-us-out-of-the-world-camp, gathered for some further purpose, who knows what. Whoever they were, they did manage to make me, I guess all of us feel useless, aimless and what-the-hell are we waiting for, plus we were getting increasingly hungry. At Village we had been able to

add to our insufficient food supply by scavenging for fruit and vegetables. No free roaming beyond specified limits here; no chance for food hunting.

The powers-that-be, I mean of the social-service types like the Red Cross and such—not governmental ones—tried to lessen the misery of the refugee-inmates population, somehow managed to try to bring some “entertainment”: into the camp. I was 11; I guess I could be made to believe we were really being entertained. I remember distinctly, I can see him, the “strong man” who could with his bare hands, bend a substantial band of steel. He got volunteers to try it, in front of our eyes; they couldn’t. And he, by whatever genius or trickery, just grabbed the thing and bent it with surprising facility. No doubt some trickery. I do remember a crowd of us showed up, eager for some distraction from where we really were, and we participated sluggishly in the chicanery. I admit, it did distract us and momentarily dulled our progressively growing misery.

And besides our dislocation from home, which by now felt like quite some time ago and was making itself seriously felt, and idleness, hunger continued to intensify and become increasingly preoccupying. It is really impressive how to an 11 year-old hunger can really be a miserable condition. I know now that it’s not just so for 11-year-olds. So it was quite an event when, some two or three months into our stay at Ricibidou we were informed that the Red Cross was going to bring us milk. We had not seen milk since we had left Village. The Red Cross brought it. I remember the canned milk taste of that era. In Europe even today, in some quite nice smaller hotels they still use this rotten-tasting stuff. Hungry as we were, it was good to have. But, distasteful as it was, I gulped it down trying not to taste, but just drank it to quiet my need for food. I was unwisely food-sensitive then still, even in the face of hunger. But I was hungry; so I

swallowed the un-milk tasting Red Cross canned milk. Meals were very sparse. I believe we ate in our barracks, though that is unlikely. On the other hand, I have absolutely no memory of a mass dining place. Whether it was brought into the barracks or we did go to a large eating hall, food—some apportioned piece of bread, probably some beans, root-type foods like turnips but no potatoes, maybe a rare small piece of some meat—food was sparse. I note that Ricibidou left fewer prints in my brain of our life there than what followed. The early part of our stay in Ricibidou for the most part was dull. No special friend, idleness, not a recipe for me.

Time just went right on totally ignoring what “they” were doing to us. Cold weather was setting in. I know that even to this day I am naïve as a geographer and climatologist, but the fact is, the weather was getting colder than I wished for. Looking at a world map today, I am still amazed to see that Southern France where all that great Bordeaux comes from is actually at the latitude of Northern California, where the California great wines now come from. The problem is that unlike California, the weather in the environs of Toulouse, after grape-harvesting time I guess—about which I learned some the following year—was strikingly chilled, more like the climates in Chicago and Boston. Actually Toulouse is at a higher latitude than these so well-known cold-in-the-winter places in America. As a Boy Scout climatologist, I would guess that the air masses and cross winds given life by the interacting Pyrenees Orientales (East Pyrenees) Mountains cold winds, the Mediterranean *Mistral* and whatever Atlantic Ocean turbulence added to the mix combined to generate this additional unanticipated miserable challenge.

The on-coming of cold weather. One of the real problems is that when we left Bruxelles in such a hurry, we did not anticipate needing colder climate clothing. Not

that it would have been feasible to carry such along. The fact is that we did not have clothes to match the changing weather. In addition, there was no central heating in the Barracks; at least not that I remember. I do remember a small wood-burning furnace centrally located in the 60 or so feet long barrack. I must be mistaken because the state of permanence in the construction of these brick barracks, I would guess built for year-round occupation, must have had some kind of heating system; it would not make sense that there would not be. The French were overpopulated with Nazis, but they were not stupid.

In any case, we were getting cold. As time passed and the cold intensified—a very egalitarian thing, cold, even our Vichy-French hosts got their fair share—we needed more heat. A chore that seemed made for kids about my age was OK with me: I was among those sent out to gather whatever dry wood lay loose on the ground, to provide whatever heat we could generate in the small furnace in our barrack. As with other chores I usually did pretty well. I had long learned to be industrious and do things competently—foremost I did well in school. I liked school, I liked learning; I guess it suited me. But, “*sans me venter*”, without bragging, I did a pretty good job gathering dry wood too. How long my success would continue? No idea. Eventually, I would not be given the chance to test it out.

So the cold was setting in and hunger continued to gnaw. We should really study how it is that human beings, at least I never did, just don’t seem to accommodate or truly adapt to being hungry. You just defend against it, either by some serious distraction—which was not forthcoming in this purgatory—or by some serious denial and numbing of hunger pain, or by some ingenious effort to get around it. My mother

tried to do something about the hunger. I admit, she did not truly succeed but I know she tried. She decided to become a merchant, at least temporarily.

Now, one of the remaining decencies the Vichy-France government extended to its unwelcome now en-camped foreign asylum seekers was that, given a good enough excuse, one could get a pass for several hours out of Ricibidou to do whatever it was one could impress the authorities, one needed to do in Toulouse. Toulouse I would soon discover could actually be accessed by tram (streetcar). Actually Ricibidou is near one of the Toulouse tram system end stations. I don't know where my mother got the idea, but she decided that she would fabricate some excuse to have to get to Toulouse where, with some of her remaining funds, she would buy some dried fruit, packaged figs and dates I remember, still available to the Vichy-French, and bring them back to Ricibidou where people not as clever or entrepreneurial as she would buy them at some profit to her, to us. I can understand, I think, why we were then still allowed to leave camp-site for a few hours. Ricibidou, though built for the duration, was not equipped with the medical staff needed to take care of a herd like us, not even of some minor animal challenge like say treating an 11-year-old Jew who, somehow got an in-grown toe-nail. And to their feeble credit, the Vichy gate-keepers recognized the need for treatment of such a condition, even though minor. Vichy had not yet stooped to its lowest level.

An ingrown toe-nail! Amazing how painful such a stupid little thing can be. But in fairness to myself, as a doctor I know that even grown-ups have trouble putting up with a really infected in-grown toe-nail. I think I was on the verge not only of being done in by the pain but also by some mysterious fear of some major harm coming to my toe, obviously a vital body part—psychoanalysts think such things. It hurt. I needed

help. I truly did not welcome the idea of visiting Toulouse under these conditions. Nor at this time. Things were really getting bad. The problem is that by now the Southern French winter was here. The date for our pass to the Toulouse Dispensary, in some Toulouse hospital, came on a day that introduced me to the degree to which a snowstorm in Toulouse could proudly compete with one in Philadelphia or New York. It was quite a serious wind-blowing snowstorm. Amazing how stiffly cold wind makes a few inches of snow bitterly painful. Unlike Shelley's "winter wind", this wind was as "unkind as man's ingratitude". In the morning, I would guess there already was more than two inches of snow on the ground. The cold wind and snow were of such magnitude that, given our lack of winter clothes, my commonsense mother decided that we would walk from the camp to the Toulouse-destined tram each wrapped in our bed blanket. Walking into the wind, the blowing snow was cutting into us so damned indifferently. How the homeless do it, I just don't know. On top of the blowing storm, I remember the agony my throbbing foot added to the mix; I was trying like all hell to be brave on our way to the tram. Though it probably was no more than two or three kilometers (1½ to 2 miles), it felt like an unending day getting to that tram. Remarkable relief came with our getting inside the tram. We all know how some everyday simple things—in Europe in that day for us getting on a tram was a simple everyday thing—can under certain conditions be so welcome.

I can't even guess how long that tram ride was. I do remember that by the time we reached Toulouse, the nasty overnight storm was dying out. (Mother Nature forgive me, but it deserved to die.) No more snow was falling, and perhaps sheltered by the Toulouse buildings or truly by the storm's ending, the walk to the Hospital was predominantly painful now due to my aching foot. All I remember of the dispensary

visit are the typical hospital muck-colored corridors, some pain in the treatment of my toe, and the relief, even though my toe ached aplenty, that something had been done to cure my ailing foot. It worked. The walk back to the tram was quite less hectic, even though I believe my toe infection was lanced—this was 1940 still; I doubt they would've even had any Sulfa antibiotic available for us miserable unwanted guests—and I had an aching foot. Clearly, my lanced ingrown toe-nail pain did not compete with the bitter Toulouse snow storm. Going back to the tram and walking back from the end of the line to Ricibidou was far easier than that morning's painful cutting through the storm

In terms of time, I estimate that we were into the cold of November 1940. We came to learn that we were leaving Ricibidou. Within two days the Jews in Ricibidou were to pack their belongings, only one piece of luggage—who had more! This one-piece of luggage policy had already been in play when we came to Ricibidou. Not that my mother and I traveled from Bruxelles overly encumbered with for-all-seasons precious baggage. I say the Jews because not all the Ricibidou inmates, even among those in our barracks, were de-camping to who knows where. My mother and an fairly attractive manly Spaniard had befriended one another during our stay, and he, unlike us, was not being separated from Ricibidou. In trying to be fair to the miserable Vichy Government, many refugees from the countries North, East, and South of France looked to France for asylum in those war years. Not just those fleeing the advancing Germans from the North-East, but also those Spaniards who were fleeing Franco's Nazi-sympathetic monster machine, squeezing north into France through the Pyrenees Mountains. The camps in Southern France were well situated to house the Spaniards as well as those of us who had gotten this far south. No great cost in transporting

Spaniards this short distance to Toulouse. I later came to recognize that a premeditated selection had been made in this choosing the Jews over the Spaniards for separation from these climate-sympathetic brick barracks of Ricibidou. Jews and Spaniards had been together. Now, we Jews were selected to go.

In preparation for our upcoming journey, my mother succeeded in getting a last pass into Toulouse, and came back with some packaged figs and, of all things, she had somehow gotten some bananas. How? From where? *Je n'en sais rien* (I haven't the slightest idea.) I had not seen fresh fruit since we left Village. I guess hunger was really getting to me because these bananas caused quite a philosophic dilemma and conflict between my mother and me. I doubt there were more bananas than 4 or 5. Of course my mother gave me one to eat soon after she arrived with them. But I wanted another one the next day. My mother had the wisdom to think of tomorrow, to want to save some for a rainy day. I was a hungry soon-to-be 12 year-old kid. My argument got a bit heated; she was really quite calm though distressed about my plight, which she knew I was not fabricating. But she held her ground; and I yielded. Somehow I was never afraid of my mother, she never got nasty-angry with me; my guess is, I yielded because I really rarely did not do what she told me to do, and I knew that what she said had good sense in it, as usual with her. It was not a battle royal at all; we argued. My mother was smart, totally non school-educated wise. When she was growing up in Poland, in the early 1900s, girls from our Jewish community just did not go to school. She was affectionate, responded to touch very comfortably, touched and held me comfortingly when it came from me or from her. In one of those old studio photos of my mother seated and I, probably 4 or so years old, standing on some stool next to her, the striking features of the photo are that neither of us looks like the happiest mother-

child pair I've seen—this was soon after we had arrived in Bruxelles—, and the warm pressure of her holding me close to her such that her hand makes an indentation in my then-chubby thigh. So, as she wished, we packed the bananas with the rest of our things with the promise that I would get some when we got to our destination.

We boarded the train outside of Toulouse. Special courtesy of our host government, we did not need to make the trek to the Toulouse train station, they came to us, near our own doorstep to take us in and transported us all the way to our destination. Nor did we have to carry our packing case. These would be transported for us to our destination too. We left Ricibidou about midday.

Rivesaltes: The Shame of Vichy-France Deepens

We traveled through the night. I don't know why it took us this long to get to our destination. The distance from Ricibidou, just outside Toulouse, to Rivesaltes, which is situated about 15 kilometers north of Perpignan, is just not that far as to required an overnight train ride on the basis of distance. I do remember that we crawled. Perhaps, come to think of it, our hosts thought it would be advantageous to them, of course, for us to arrive in the morning rather than late at night. Anyway, they had us neatly enough packed in the train—these were traveler wagons not the cattle wagons so familiar to all the least bit knowledgeable about the Holocaust.

We arrived on a bleak winter-wind-blowing day to a gray-soil plain, some 20 kilometers from foothills of the Eastern Pyrenees Mountains, spread with barracks that immediately struck me as cheaply-built, ugly, depressing; some for all appearances in need of repair. Round and round we had gone to get down to this next circle of hell; that's why the train trip took so long. I remember our arrival there, now 60 years later:

it was a bleak part of France, at a bleak time, on this bleak day. This place did not promise good days. Nor did it give the impression of permanence. The Ricibidou barracks were brick. The Rivesaltes barracks were of wood slats, inside walls were white-gray-plaster covered. Ricibidou barracks were partitioned in three or four sections, and there was some provision for heat by means of a small wood-burning stove, the wood gathered from the surrounds within the camp. Rivesaltes barracks were one large open box: dormitory, eating place, dwelling place, all packed in one's own bed area, our bed serving all furniture purposes, chair, table, etc. The barracks were lined along their length with beds on each of the long sides. I do not remember any stove in the barrack. I guess that in addition to whatever we could put on ourselves, clothes and blankets when it got very cold, our own bodies provided whatever heat there was. We did gather wood in Rivesaltes, possibly to make small fires outdoors—or my mother and I would not have thought of my gathering wood to deceive those who might be interested in my eventual illicit activity. The bed frames were made of 2 x 4 wood beams—like the ones in the first Toulouse camp where the Vichy Government first detained us, except that the Rivesaltes beds were single beds, not double-bunks—across which stretched single, straightforward wires, north to south and east to west. A coarse-cloth mattress sack filled with straw, one coarse-wool gray blanket. Sheets? Not included. Now, my emphasis on the coarseness of both the straw-filled mattress and the blanket just made themselves clear to me about one hour ago from this writing. I feel compelled to explain.

Soon after I decided the time had come for me to write about my witnessing and living a piece of the Holocaust, during a stretch of time from the end of July to August 14, 2002, it seemed I had managed to make contact with some poison-ivy and soon

started to develop a typical, very itchy rash. Those who react allergically to poison-ivy know what I'm talking about. The problem is that having been the victim of this miserable allergic reaction before, I had become well acquainted with the various structural features and color-bound manifestations through which poison-ivy evolves during a season. But my diagnosis brought with it a dilemma: there is and there was no poison ivy on our property. As the course of my nasty and very itchy skin ailment dragged on, my Dermatologist and Internist decided to eliminate from my average-expectable aging-optimizing medications those medicines that might possibly cause some skin rash. My reactive skin rash had by now turned from an acute condition (a sudden, short-lasting condition) to a somewhat chronic one (a long-continuing state of symptoms or disease). My astute Dermatologist was puzzled by what I was harboring. It came to him by both a process of elimination and years of clinical know-how about diagnostic manifestations of skin disorders, to pursue in good doctorly fashion a line of thought that caused him some unease. Gently, hesitatingly probing of a shrink if he was having some emotional problems, he asked, "Henri, excuse my wondering but, is something especially troubling you these days? This really looks like 'Nummular Eczema' (a specific form of the widely known skin disorder that tortures children and adults) which has strong emotional determinants (especially stress and rage) acting on a skin diathesis (specific inborn vulnerability due to some organ or system sensitivity)". I smiled, I think, and barely shaking my head in thought told him, "Bernie, I think you just hit it on the head." And I went on to explain that I noted with some constancy, that during those times when I was writing this story, my Holocaust story, I was almost continually itching, at times squirming, and then I would feel compelled to apply the topical agent (skin medication) he had prescribed for me and/or take an antihistamine.

Both stress and rage come with this writing, quiet but not so quiet rage, as in this writing, as Rachel (my wife) has wisely said, “It’s a self-analysis; it may even help you more [than an analysis].” She means “a psychoanalysis”.

Writers, artists, psychoanalysts and many others live like that. We look for explanations and for hidden meanings. Children do this too; they have to know how things work; that’s why kids take toys apart, not to break them—at least not much of the time—but to find out what makes them tick. That’s why many kids annoy impatient parents with seemingly unending “Why” questions. Well, there’s a lot to learn when you’ve just come into this unknown world. Kids have to have explanations like why glass breaks when it hits the floor, or why a bird flies away. Scientists always have to look for causes, effects, forces, hidden activity, etc. But it was just this morning, fourth month into this writing and into my reactive skin disorder (I now know that it is reactive; I have never had eczema before although I have long been wool-next-to-my-skin-intolerant) that this insight opened up. In Rivesaltes we slept on coarse sack-cloth mattresses. They could even have been olden days potato-sack cloth; at the very least they were coarse flour-sack type cloth. Just the thought of it makes my skin crawl. And we covered ourselves with that army-type coarse wool blanket. This specific insight—which may have merit because of the epiphany reaction I had to it—will not immediately clear my skin, which seems to be heading in that direction now anyway. But it will not clear it today because skin reactions of this nasty kind don’t just wash away; they have to be, we might say, detoxified and metabolized by the psyche and by the body. The sleeping accommodations, plain and simple, reflected the misery that was Rivesaltes. And I feel this, specifically in my skin.

The toileting facilities were in another barrack. Given that it was Rivesaltes, one would imagine that the toileting accommodations would match the grade level of the “living place” barracks. They were not; they managed to be yet a further notch toward degradation. Located about 100 yards from the barrack in which we “lived”, the toileting facilities I frequented, there were two as will become clear, were semi-unroofed wooden structures superimposed on a skeleton cement base or floor that was elevated from the ground by about three feet. We climbed up several steps to get to this gray slab cement level. With entrances on each side of this rectangular ugly cement-wood model of supreme, what “military”? economy-driven simplicity? aimed-to-offend always odoriferous place? from where I walked in, the toilet cubicles were on the right, and the latrine in this unisex facility and crude cement sinks with one cold-water only “*robinet*” were on the left. (When I turn to French as I just did and have done before, it’s because that is the language at hand in my brain and at times I can think of the French word but not the English, the language I chose to write in—yes, “faucet” is the word I’m looking for.) In winter, somehow I believe we had no snow in the plain at the foothills of the Pyrenees Mountains, yet there was the miserable November snow storm in slightly more northern, but more landscaped Ricibidou. I am not a weatherman. In any case, my point is that while the wind was nasty, as I remember it, thought I may not have been aware of it, the temperature did not drop to the level of freezing our outdoor source of wash-water. I don’t believe the water froze in the faucets even though there absolutely was no man-made heating in these ungradable—as they do for hotels these days—bathroom facilities.

The wall-latrine, typical in lesser elegant Western Europe spots, was of the grayish-green variety. Of course, smelly as all men know—in this case the women did

too—; but not intolerable even to a smell-sensitive now-12 year-old, since one had to just accommodate to it. The camp was bad enough without our just smelling up the whole area rather than just focus it all in one spot with an odorous surround of about 20 feet in radius. But it's the cubicles that got the disgust prize. All I need say is that the cubicled toilets consisted of a hole in the cement slab-floor, that they had no doors, and that there must have been some kind of toilet paper to help us not bring some residuum of what we were trying to leave behind back into our "living" quarters with us. Now, this kind of toilet structure may surprise some among us, but the fact is that this kind of toilet facility was not that far from the out-house or public facility models one could find in 1940s Western Europe—and still finds in some places today. Just degrade it a few notches.

As I said, as I remember it, our wash-water faucets did not freeze. In fact a bit of freezing might have made living conditions a bit better, although, like so many people living in colder latitudes, I had really tasted freezing and it has its own texture of misery. In January-February 1941, going from our barrack to the toilet required a strategy of finding your way from one less muddy footstep to another. A little more solid ground would have helped, and the smells might not have traveled as far too. Somehow the toileting facilities seemed to always have a number of people there; maybe, that's not so surprising. I think I may be dwelling on this part of "camp-life" because of a very meaningful association, as we psychoanalysts say, I have to it. It touches on one of the most painful after-effects of all this—what my miserable Holocaust experience has gifted my family with. I will say more about this later. But these toileting facilities seemed to really have troubled one of my grandsons when we "visited" the remains of Rivesaltes in 1997. When my grandsons Eli (Elliot) and

Arthur, our son Karl, their father, their mother Sabina, Rachel and I spent a few hours revisiting the ruin-remains of Rivesaltes—the monument it is now, somewhat like the *Gedaechtsnichkierche* in Berlin, the majestic partly destroyed enormous church remaining unrepaired as a memorial to the destruction of war—Eli, had gone into the toileting structure to see it's remains. The cement structures were still there. It was days later when we were in Bruxelles that Eli, in his uniquely sympathetic, intimate manner, forewarning that he was going to say something about Rivesaltes as if to prepare me for the pain we were about to share, said to me, “Zaida, is that where you went to the bathroom?” Following that with a pause and, “You know . . .” [‘what I mean’ didn’t have to be said]. I put my hand on the back of his shoulder, “Yes, Eli, that’s where we went to the bathroom”. My beloved grandchildren. Eli’s inquiry reminded me of what a microcosm of misery those toileting facilities were.

Understand, I want my family, everyone of them, to feel, say, ask, whatever they may about what happened, whatever it may be, so that they may lessen the burden it has, I have, and what happened to me has, and continues to cause them.

But coming into this seeming pre-occupation here with toileting, one of the things that lightened the French foreign burden was attached to these toilets—dysentery; it did a number of the camp inmates in. Most of the deaths in Rivesaltes were due to starvation and illness, as well as that those who came to Rivesaltes with “pre-existing (medical) conditions” as insurance companies like to remind us of in American, conditions prevailing in Rivesaltes dramatically facilitated and accelerated the evolution of these “pre-existing conditions” and brought their hosts to a premature end. Rivesaltes was an unsanitary place to be; but that was only part of Rivesaltes’ brutality. A number of miserable factors made it so brutal.

I know that whatever we were going to face, my mother and I were of a disposition to do the best we could with it; at this point I could do so, as long as I was with my mother. Of course, in early 1941 we were not at the peak of European Jews' misery then. That would come later. Our circumstances were not, by a long shot, as dire then as many Jews would and did face later. But for now, what I learned from Primo Levi and some of my colleagues, we were not "Mussulman", the fate of too many among us, mortified, robotized humans with no fight or hope; a disastrous way of reacting to terror. But as I said this was early in our Holocaust history for "Mussulman" adaptation; my mother and I were nowhere near that point.

In Rivesaltes, Life Went On.

As I remember it, men and women stayed in separate quarters. Families were separated. Men and women could and did visit at certain times of the day; the best of my recollection is seeing Savic's father—I'll get to Savic shortly—in the late afternoon and early evening hours. Very much my good fortune, children under 13 stayed with their mothers. I was just about to turn 12 when we got to Rivesaltes; so I stayed with my mother. *Pas d'question* (no doubt), I don't know where I would have ended up were I one year older.

What they fed us was just as bleak as the time in history we were going through, as bleak as the plain at the foothills of the distantly visible Pyrenees, the barracks; the whole package. Food was brought to us in man-carried drums. In the mornings we got one piece of darkish bread with one spoon of watery brown syrup, probably an attempt to make the bread more palatable. It really wasn't necessary to make it palatable; starvation made it so. I know I prized my morning and evening piece of bread, as did

everyone else. Though I never participated in such activity, I would not be surprised if some bread-for-things trading went on—somewhat like Primo Levi describes. Midday we were treated to watery soup with some kind of vegetation in it. No bread at this meal. In the evening, we again got a piece of bread and some cut-up turnips or rutabagas. It is well known that hunger will make us, even most kids, overcome our distaste and even disgust with certain foods. Just as I self-protectively then did not allow myself to feel intolerant of my sack-cloth and wool bedding, so too, I swallowed turnip and rutabaga without puking. It wasn't just the environs, the barracks, the climate that was a significant downgrade from Ricibidou, so was the food, in quality and quantity. I assume that we were also supplied with drinking water. Whether or not some coffee or tea was made available to grown ups, I can't recall. I do know, there was no milk here.

Hunger intensified. I recall one incident with yesterday clarity, when I was hung in the balance of disgust and yet real sympathy for some poor bastard. Progressively getting skinnier, all of us, some did whatever they could to get just a bit more food. Our food was usually brought into our barrack in metal containers and distributed by two men, the same two men for a time. One morning during the bread and syrup distribution, one of the two men dropped the container of syrup; it was not glass, it was a metal can type of thing. Nonetheless a substantial amount of the contents spilled onto the cement floor. As if by reflex, without thought or hesitancy, one of the men just dropped to the floor and with acceleration of pace, started to slurp up as much of the brown sugary muck from the floor as he could. His distribution mate joined him on the floor, but at a much slower pace, I now guess, more conflicted than the other about notching down to that level to attenuate his miserable hunger, whatever the way.

The floor was not filthy, some routine broom sweeping did occur. But this was cement; not a clean floor. It did not enter the equation for this man; “food” was lying on the floor and he was grabbing it as best he could. I must admit that in spite of my hunger, I had no push to join him on the floor. I don’t think out of fear of disapproval by my mother. She too, did not drop to that level. That poor man did. Yes, I was troubled with what these conditions had brought this man to; but I could sympathize with him. I was young; I didn’t know some of us would do much worse things as time passed.

My pre-occupation with food took me on a different path. I was waiting with some impatience for our luggage. Just the one piece we now owned. Yes, my interest lay more in those bananas than whatever else we had in the luggage. I was hungry, like everyone else; but I had a vested interest in what was ours that we had shipped along in absolute anticipation that what belonged to us would get to us. Yes, it took much longer than either my mother or I, nor anyone else for that matter, had imagined. When we were informed that our luggage had arrived, everyone, it seemed to me, experienced it as most welcoming news. Well, the news was not so good. When we got our luggage, like that of the others, we found that our meager belongings had been pillaged, cases open and virtually trashed. What!? “Well, [I guess], these were Jews’ belongings, so why not take what we needed?” I can understand the decrepit reasoning, what I have called “malignant distortion”: “*Les sales Juifs* are trash; they rob good people, . . .” We all know the rationalizing: “What I do is just and right; absolutely sanctified by the gods.”

To be sure, I knew my mother was not the one who caused the pillaging. But I was right, so silly and little boy, really: she should have let me have another banana. It was more annoyance with her than anger; she was as insulted, miserable and outraged

as I was. I really wanted only one more; I was not a greedy kid. Who am I trying to convince? One of those I least need to convince about such matters? My mother? She never blamed me for anything that happened; she never accused me of being greedy. Nor of anything else for that matter. She never said or expressed the feeling in my presence nor to me, that I was a burden to her. This theft of our meager belongings I remember as a moment where I probably silently went into expletives, like *merde* (shit), *salauds!* (bastards) and all that. Mild compared to what I would say today.

Even in the face of these miseries, life went on in Rivesaltes; it would in all but the most dire of circumstances. Children, biologically promised the right to a long life ahead of them, feel the need to go on. This does at times require denial of existing circumstances and conditions, just as patients with cancer or prisoners on death row often deny they are at death's threshold and plan for the future. We, several kids about my age, 2 other boys and 2 girls, at times organized ourselves into activity. It seemed to fall into place naturally. We didn't have any schooling, that is the expectable schooling kids get in Western Europe, nor were there boy scout type activities as we got in Ricibidou. Other than our individual meanderings not far from our barrack and the cardinal activity of wood gathering for our small outdoor fires that transiently succeeded at protecting our cold-sensitive thinning selves, we spontaneously fell into two memorable activities. In order of frequency they were, for the boys, playing The Three Musketeers, and on several occasions, the boys and girls spent a couple evening hours dancing. Yes, dancing in Rivesaltes. Only kids could be that, what? Nuts? Unaware that they were at risk, targeted for further abuse, further denigration, . . . Sometimes, kids are smarter than grown-ups. We had our priorities right: Live while you can; there are no absolute signs that tomorrow will be worse! I know—I may be

pushing it. But the fact is; we did that. We played *Les Trois Mousquetaires* and we danced. We still could, I guess, *because* we did not know what lay ahead.

Since we were three, and all smart enough French-speaking kids 11 years of age have read *Les Trois Mousquetaires*, it is perfectly plausible that needing to fight our victimization, needing to feel heroic, that's where our fantasies would take us. We played The Three Musketeers outside, during the day, running up and down some mounds of earth and building construction waste remains, pretending we were the heroes encountering and, of course always, winning over the evil Cardinal Richelieu and his henchmen. That this was early in the winter of 1940-1941, before the worst to happen reached us directly, that it was early in the Holocaust denouement probably was the factor that both allowed us to still play, and accounts for our not converting in our play, the nasty Richelieu into Adolph Hitler—just typing that name into this manuscript makes me sick!

I need a break here.

What a miserable name

.

Playing The Three Musketeers really engaged my friends and me. We would at times just fall into a brief Three Musketeers interaction as on crossing paths going to the toilet for instance. I guess we were trying to facilitate our tolerating what had and was happening to us; I guess it helped us, me at least, feel we were not completely victims. I assume that Savic and our third musketeer—whose name I can't remember—might have been doing the same. We could fight evil, even if only in play, that medium which children use naturally to cope with fear, with anxiety and stress. We played it, we

played it, and we played it. It must have worked fairly effectively for us, otherwise, we would have quickly abandoned the game.

The other way we kids tried to go on living was by dancing. We did this a few times only, early during our stay in Rivesaltes. The first barrack in which we were housed had a small entry area partitioned from the rest of the dormitory-like barrack. It was probably 12 by 6 feet. Whose idea it was, what made us think we could dance—that is actually not step on each other's toes—how we would in fact do so, I can't recall. I guess it was a community-of-5 effort. The fact is that here we were two girls and three boys about 11 years old, give a year on either side, dancing to quietly provided music. I provided the music. During my earliest elementary school years in Bruxelles, I found that I really liked singing. It felt uniquely good to sing. It probably is not so surprising; my mother occasionally would sing; I liked it when she sang. I recall singing in the choir in school in Bruxelles, as I would do again later, in the U. S. My singing was subdued; whether to not disturb the others on the other side of the partition, whether out of embarrassment, or out of a feeling that to sing and dance at this time, in this place, was a highly paradoxical thing to be doing. I don't know. Whatever mixed feelings we experienced as we tried to go on living, we danced to my quietly singing tunes popular during that time. *J'attendrai*—which I believe was derived from the intermezzo in Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* where Cho Cho San, Suzuki, and Trouble, the young child, asleep, are waiting the return of Pinkerton; a sad, beautiful musical line—was one of my favorites. Just as Cho Cho San does, the lyrics in *J'attendrai*—not provided by Puccini or his librettist—speak to waiting for the soldier's return from war, “Day and night, I'll await your return, . . . forever”.

We were kids about 11 years old. Unless worries really lay you low, life goes on, fortunately.

The Move to the Jewish Quarter

Near the end of February or early March 1941, we were trans-located yet a further circle downward into hell. Due to the soon to come Passover Holidays, and the wishes of our host government to duly respect our religious rituals and food requirements, we were told, that the Jews in Rivesaltes would be relocated to an area in the Camp apart from the others. Thus, I found out that there were other than Jews imprisoned here in Rivesaltes. My guess is there were more Spanish refugees here, who didn't reach up to the Toulouse area, possibly refugees from Italy, some government undesirables, who knows. But, we were selected out again, the chosen people, in an effort by our hosts to see to it that our *pessachdicker* meals not be contaminated with any leavened bread or other such abundant *non-pessachdicker* products! I heard no expressions of appreciation by any among us. On the contrary, the reactions in the air transmitted that this unexpected announcement was not good news. My speculation has been that this was Vichy-France-government mandated, not just an improvised way some thoughtful camp administrators had of separating the Jews from other unwanted refugees, in respect for and to protect the Jews' Passover.

The move to the "Jewish Quarter" was a further degradation. Our new barracks were in fact grayer and in a worse state of repair than the ones we just left. In these, we were at times chilled by the sounds of the ubiquitous *Mistral*. The walls at least protected us against its actual cold chill. *Le Mistral* is an established Southern France notorious wind that in winter has a cutting chill, which I am certain is what earned it its

not so pleasant reputation and was deemed to be respectfully deserving of a name, *Le Mistral*. One does not say, simply, “*C’est du mistral*” as if one said “It’s just wind”, one says “*C’est Le Mistral*”, “It’s The Mistral”, like “It’s the Grand Inquisitor”. Maybe, in fact, *Le Mistral*’s northern source was further cold-tempered by air-flows coming from the Pyrenees (Mountains), that high-reaching frontier that separates and binds France and Spain.

We had no choice; we settled in. The weather at this time was perhaps the worst we had yet experienced since we left Bruxelles. It was a serious matter because not having winter clothing compelled improvisation of warming garment. I know that I was not alone in finding that my shoes were now no longer protective of my feet. They must have reached a sufficient point of uselessness that my mother—don’t ask me where she got it—made me a pair of shoes out of blanket material. Whose blanket? I just have no idea. All I know is that my seamstress mother had made me a new pair of shoes. They worked.

Until *Pessach* came, our diet was not much different than before. Maybe it all seemed just a little more gray. Rutabagas, turnips, very diluted soup—really it was barely more than water with some effort at seasoning. And our two pieces of brownish-gray bread. To the best of my recollection, the brown syrup ran out, or at least was no longer part of our diet. Then came *Pessach*. Actually the diet did not change from that just described except that now, instead of bread, we got Matzah! I am certain it was made of straw; if not entirely, at least in part! It tasted like straw, I think; I can’t be sure since I have put straw in my mouth but never have eaten any. It was like straw. Fortunately, *Pessach* lasted only 8 days. We returned to bread. I love matzah. This was not Matzah. But this was not Bruxelles.

Kids, at least kids like me (then) of which there are zillions, actually find idleness a really boring and “this isn’t right” kind of thing. I had done nothing like opening a book for some months now. But even though in Ricibidou we had no books, at least we had some kind of learning-instruction going on. I am certain that all the teaching was by word of mouth; no books. Even so, we had some teaching! Now we had no teaching except, given our prevailing condition, how to deal with insufficient food, how to take care of our toileting needs, how to cope with the cold, how to try to stay alive in an all-but-hollow life in this second circle of Inferno. My sense is that, what made things bearable for me is that I had my mother, and she had me—I know that my being there kept her going.

How to cope with the cold gave me some assignment and responsibility that I welcomed. It must have made me feel useful; I was doing something for us. Since I can remember, I have always liked being a “Boy Scout.” To do my duty, I would go out by myself usually, potato sac in hand, and search among the low-lying bushes in the camp, mostly briar, for any piece of burnable wood. Actually, I think most of the wood came from the briar itself, dead briar. Finding dead wood in briar bushes is not without risk. Briar protects itself with seriously prickly spines against those who would uproot it or do it whatever harm. These are not rose-thorns; these are sewing needles size spines, big ones. Of course, none of us gathered enough dead wood on our own to accommodate our needs; but I did feel that I helped. The cold was serious. In Bruxelles, which is quite colder than the foothills of the Pyrenees, we had the clothes we needed to cope with it and of course, our home was warm and comfortable. In fact, I remember with deeply felt well-being, the warmth of approaching evening and dinner in our *premier etage* home, 5 or 6 Rue de l’Economie. Somehow in winter it

was always cozier, warmer than at other times. In Riversaltes, we were not sartorially equipped to handle *Le Mistral* of winter and we were in a gray hell..

Dealing with Nature's elements got significantly worse when it rained. The mix of Southern France winter temperature and wind did not reach freezing levels—which could at least have provided us with firmer ground. Had we had freezing weather, freezing according to the laws of Physics, I might have thought otherwise. In any case, the freezing mix of wind and rain made staying indoors compelling. But of course, we did need to occasionally go out there. As I noted earlier, the challenge of avoiding inches-deep mud puddles in a mud path, knowing that we would have to relieve ourselves in the abysmal toileting accommodations to which we were restricted, made going to the toilet a very unpleasant undertaking. The only saving factors in the exercise were to get rid of waste products our bodies just could not contain and to get some fresh air, even when it was wet and cold.

My knowledge of European history about this era, 1940 to 1945, repeated readings notwithstanding, seems to never sink into my brain. I know pieces; I have trouble putting them together. Interesting, how for one who graduated from every school I attended with High Honors—except for Music School where I only managed Honors because of my downfall, Solfeggio—, I can't put these pieces of information together in proper sequence. My brain doesn't want to cooperate in my effort. That's now. But then, having just finished 5th Grade in Bruxelles, I was not into History or Current Events, except for those that directly affected us. But no doubt, the adults knew some things that were going on then about which I had no idea whatsoever. It was not by accident, nor that my mother was getting tired of the life we traded in to get out of Belgium ahead of the advancing Germans. Information not available to me had gotten

to her, is my guess, that the Jews were in serious trouble, even in Vichy-France, supposedly free from the Germans. As I think of it now, my mother knew something very bad about our fate. I was not looking ahead; she was. The question seemed to me to come out of the blue, except that I had grasped something she and Savic's mother had been talking about. When we were alone, she presented the issue, the big question, I guess one of the biggest questions in my life. She told me that she wanted me to escape from Rivesaltes! She made it a statement of her wish, but she did pose it as a question. She conveyed its seriousness and risk. She was telling me and she was asking me if I would escape without her; she really did want to know my response. Without her, that was the big part. "OK Ma, *ch'vill teen vus du zugst*" ("I'll do what you say"), is most likely what I would have said to her in Bruxellois Yiddish. Our life together had made me fairly self-reliant, within limits of my age. She knew I could do things on my own, some things. I trusted her; and she could count on me to do what she wanted me to do. That was our history, my mother and me.

The Question of Escaping from Rivesaltes

Evidently by the time my mother told me she wanted me to escape from Rivesaltes, it was evident that she and Saavic's parents had been talking about us, Savic and me, escaping from Rivesaltes together. There was wisdom in this, in that Savic and I were frequently together at this time. We were two of the Three Musketeers. Why the third boy was not included in this scheme, I don't know. It could account for my not remembering his name. I do know this though, that I had come to like Savic's mother; his father too, though he seemed less aware of "the kids"; his parents seemed to be nice people. Savic's father looked like a well-educated but not easily approachable man; his

mother was a bright and warm woman. So our parents had been scheming, and Savic and I, were totally unaware of it. Why did this question of escape come up at this time, or at all? It was clear that the idea defied existing law, the law of Vichy-France, Unoccupied, Free-France. *Vive la France-Libre!* Yes, we had chosen to come to France. But we had not chosen to come to Rivesaltes, nor Ricibidou or any of this. By 12 you have a pretty good idea about law and breaking law. Where did my mother and Savic's parents learn that this should even be contemplated? Did they get news about the murder of Jews in Eastern Europe? I guess it is not surprising that I did not hear any radio in our barracks. If there was one, probably only a few people would have been privy to it. I do remember at times hearing vague talk among the grown-ups, *sotto voce*, about ravages against the Jews in Poland, the kind of you're-not-supposed-to-hear-thing kids all over the world are annoyed with by grown-ups. Grown-ups always seem to have things to say that must be said with the kids around but they don't want the kids to hear. And kids always get dribs and drabs of it and are left to their own devices to sort these out—real imagination-stirring. But we were living in that surround; there was always a worry-weighted cloud of audible phrases and bits of talk between grown-ups about the hurts and threats against us Jews. Actually that was there even before we left Bruxelles, it was part of the ambiance of anti-Semitism in Europe. But as one might expect, since our sudden rush out of Belgium, except for the three months in Village, this cloud of threats was with us at a much more real level. This threat-surround progressively increased in intensity, as we were moved to Ricibidou, then to Rivesaltes, and then to the Jewish ghetto within Rivesaltes. I think the audible and emotion-weighted surround was heating up. I don't know which made me much more aware of

the worry-surround: an actual increase in its intensity or my mother's telling me that she wanted me to escape from Rivesaltes. I'm not sure it matters which came first. According to Nora Levin¹, at just about this time, in March 1941, following Hitler's "demand", Nazi troops started to mass-murder the Jews of Eastern Europe. This was not yet "*The Final Solution*". It was just a much more virulent advance from *Kristallnacht*, November 9, 1938, to mass murders in Eastern Europe, before *Wannsee* and the soon to follow "*The Final Solution*" which would be activated a year from this time, in April or May 1942. *BabiYar*, outside of Kiev, would happen later too, on September 19, 1941. We were now in April 1941. My repeated readings of Marrus and Paxton², William Shirer³ and Nora Levin¹ over the years informed me that the mass massacre of Jews in Poland and Russia by the German Nazi troops was now beginning. I knew nothing of that then. But I would guess that our adults somehow knew. Knowing my mother, she knew. I assume that Savic's mother and father, and other grown ups knew. Sometimes grown ups just know; they find out things kids never can.

I did not weigh the pros and cons of my mother's wish, of escaping—without her! I don't know if it was too difficult for me to think about, whether I was just too young to really know how to compute this question, or what. Looking back, I had no

¹ *The Holocaust: The Destruction of European Jewry, 1933-1945* by Nora Levin. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1968.

² *Vichy France and the Jews* by Michael R. Marrus and Robert O. Paxton, published by Schocken Books, NY, 1983.

³ *The Rise and Fall of The Third Reich* by William Shirer, published by Simon and Schuster, NY, 1960.

way of measuring the consequences of such a venture. It was not even a question of that. To me the question was, if my mother thought this is what I should do, this is what I would do. I was growing up. I was now 12. I would do what she said. To a degree I knew, and evidently she knew, that once out, I would figure out what I needed to do. But the question of escape from Riversaltes, that, I didn't even contemplate; it was all her idea.

At the start, plans were that Savic and I would escape together. My mother and I talked together; I don't know what Savic and his parents did. We, the two families, kids included, did not all talk together. The grown ups talked together. My mother told me what to do in broad strokes: from the barrack, to the road to Perpignan, to the train station in Perpignan and the purchase of a train ticket to Marseilles, to my destination there, a specific address, that of the OSE, *Oeuvre de Secours aux Enfants* (Work [or Action] of Rescue [or Help] of Children). How she got that address is not clear to me. The OSE would get one or two Social Workers or volunteers into Rivesaltes. Vivette Samuel, who wrote a memoir of her work with the OSE, *Sauver Les Enfants* (Save the Children) volunteered to be encamped in Rivesaltes. But she got there after my escape and at this moment I still can't trace how my mother got the OSE's address, *rue de L'Italie*, in Marseilles. In any case, she got it. My mother would give me the money for the train ticket. How did she know what it would cost for a train ticket from Perpignan to Marseilles? In any case, she would give me enough for that. Of course, I had to travel inconspicuously, so I would not carry a sac of any kind with my clothes in it. Being clothes-minded I guess, as a seamstress, she told me that I would wear double layers of everything, including pants. Thank goodness she didn't expect me to wear two pairs of cloth shoes; that would have been *un peu drole* (a bit funny). The day

selected was May 1, the European Labor Day. The reasoning was that there would be fewer guards on sentinel duty around the periphery's barbed wire fence. That barbed wire was only about three to four feet, and besides, I knew that there were spots where there wasn't any. The French are not as efficient as the Germans; the whole world knows that.

Our planning was pretty well done. What about Savic? I am not sure how I felt about it, but several days before May 1, Savic's parents let us know that they had changed their minds; Savic is not going. Whether this came from his mother? His father? Or Savic himself, I don't know. So, I was to go alone. My mother was set; she must have felt certain that things were going to go worse soon. I got the impression that she did not want to take a chance in delaying. Interestingly, I have later read that two months later, in July 1941, the Vichy government instituted yet still greater restrictions on the French Jews who then were not yet interned with the Foreign Jews in the camps.

My mother was determined, and I was set. Where did she get the courage to let me go? I know that it was not easy for her to do this. She had already lost her first-born when she left Poland eight or so years earlier. My mother and father had separated while we all were still in Lodz, Poland. How long they had been separated before my mother and I left Poland for Belgium, I don't know. But the fact is that when my mother and I left Poland, my mother left my brother, her first-born with our father, my grandparents (both sets) and their large families. Knowing my mother as I did, as I do, she most likely felt two things. First, that my brother was in safe hands with our father and our large families in Lodz, that he would be well-enough cared for, and perhaps even that he would be more secure there than in the unknown universe into which she was going and was taking me. Second, that she could not manage by herself with two

very young children. In fact, for a period of time, I don't know how long before she settled into work (a seamstress) in Bruxelles, she placed me in a Catholic orphanage, of which I have memories to this day: some really quite nice Nun-teachers in Kindergarten, one I found especially pretty, a bully who I tried to get off my back by giving him the few coins my mother gave me when she came to visit, and a state of low-keyedness especially reflected in my reaction of wonder when I saw the first primrose breaking out to announce better times ahead. These few notes of background may explain sufficiently why I ask, how could my mother make the determination that she wanted me to escape, that she wanted us to separate.

I think she could do it because, she told me at the time that she would very soon follow me. Years later Savic's mother would tell me that, she in fact did escape from Rivesaltes, but she was somehow found, probably reported by some loyal Vichy French antisemite, and was returned to Rivesaltes. And when I have considered the question, Why was she among those chosen from Rivesaltes to be sent to Auschwitz the following year, I wonder if her having escaped (and been recaptured) had been a factor in her being selected for extermination. As Primo Levi noted, a simple Yes or a No could do it. Nearly two hundred years before, Franz Schubert had written a song about these *Tzwei Kleine Woertchen . . . die halten die ganze Welt hinein* (Two little words that hold the entire world in them).

Escape from Rivesaltes

1 May, 1941. I think I slept well-enough, the night into May 1. We were up fairly early. We waited till after we were regaled with our morning piece of bread. I absolutely do not remember our good-byes. Knowing my mother and me, we no doubt

hugged and held one another somewhat longer than usual. I was to be inconspicuous from beginning to end. I felt odd, somewhat uncomfortable, with double layers of underclothes, socks, shirts and pants. I was already very skinny by then, so I'm sure I didn't look over-bloated. I don't know if I even said good-by to Savic or his mother. I left, armed with my small potato sac—no idea where my mother got it to begin with—, on duty to collect wood for our still occasionally needed source of heat.

I walked to the specified outer area of the camp, in the direction that would head me toward the highway to Perpignan, as close as possible to the camp-adjacent elevated twin railroad tracks. I played the part well, I think, of taking seriously the task of bending down to pick up dead bits of wood among the briar. Casually I looked around to see where the guards were located. I was in luck; I didn't see any guards at all—maybe they were all in the latrine at once, who knows. I bent down, and still seeing no one, dropped to the ground. With that, I could feel my whole body racing, no doubt my heart bounding. I know how I react when I get a sudden scare. Dropping to the ground frightened me. I now guess that I felt my escape set in motion by just this act. I had not felt any fear before that moment.

I started to crawl toward the mound-elevated train track. I soon found that what I knew before of the briar was so, the live bushes had big spines that hurt when, not in my plans, I hit them head on. I used the potato sac to shield my hands and forearms as I crawled, more carefully but just as quickly as I could. Within some 20 or 30 feet from the train-track-mound I stopped, raised my head slowly as little as I needed to again see if there were any sentinels, and saw none. The mound rose about 5 feet high. Bracing myself for it, I quickly bounded up and started to run. I cleared the mound, the tracks and landed on the other side of it. Shielded now from direct view from camp-side, I had

not stopped; semi-crouched I continued to run, more scared now than before. I ran like hell. I was running scared shitless through a still barren vineyard, the ground was sandy, I tripped on something, crashed harmlessly in the soft ground, immediately got myself back up and continue to run as if I hadn't stopped. Beyond the vineyard I continued my course through more vision-protective shrubs and trees. Once in those, feeling less visible, I slowed my pace some; I didn't stop. Suddenly, there was the highway. Good fortune had it that the highway was sided by three or so feet ditches that ran along each side, all the way from where I met the highway to Perpignan. This, I guess my mother didn't know, that there was a protective ditch I could use for as long as it went and as I needed. Also fortunate, there was no water in the long ditch, nearly a trench, along the road.

The macadam paved road, a two-lane, unmarked affair—of course this is 1941—ran to Perpignan, some 10 or so kilometers into the city. I marched as best and as fast as I could in the ditch. I doubt anyone saw me during those kilometers into Perpignan. My guess is that I got there at about 3 or so in the afternoon. Once into the small city—Perpignan was still small when we revisited in 1997—I had no difficulty finding the railroad station. I made a point of not looking into anyone's face, as we do when we hope no one will see us. I can't tell if I looked unusual. Skinny kids I guess were not a novelty then, anywhere. I worried most about my cloth shoes, that they might give me away as a penniless, homeless waif and who knows where he might've come from. Perpignan was not a war devastated zone; the Germans had not dropped bombs on Vichy-France. Thus there were no signs of bombs anywhere; its not as though I could have been taken for some poor orphaned kid whose parents got killed

when their house was blown to bits by some bomb. To be as invisible as possible was one of my prime tasks. But I did have to buy a train ticket.

I got to the train station, had no difficulty seeing the ticket counter; as casually as I could I asked for a ticket for the next train to Marseilles and its cost. The next train was at about 11 p.m. that evening. I had the money needed, handed it over; I think the clerk didn't even look at me. To my relief, the clerk just handed me the ticket and some change. Once I got my ticket, I realized to my distress that I had hours to wait. It was about mid-afternoon and the train left late that night. I absolutely was not going to stay in the station. I needed a secluded place where I could hide until nightfall at least. What in the world led me to decide on one of those everywhere-in-France enclosed public toilets as a hiding place? Not difficult to figure out: find a toilet with cubicles with doors and I had it made. Not a savory place, but it would keep me hidden.

Hiding from early afternoon until a 10 p.m. or so train departure time in a toilet stall I can see to this day, is not one of my favorite memories. I don't see the inside of the stall, I see the view of the stalls one gets on entering the toilet. I was not bored in that stall. I was out of Rivesaltes even if only for a few hours, with the promise of more. But I hated being where I was. To this day I feel rage at having been forced to do this. And on top of it, I was scared. No wonder I fell flat on my face, when we came out of the train station in Perpignan many, many years later. Well, not exactly on my face; I gashed my knee falling when it hit the edge of a curb; I just did not see the sidewalk elevation from the street when we were searching for the car rental we had engaged from the U.S. This is when Rachel, our son Karl, his wife Sabina, and their children, Eli and Arthur, and I got to Perpignan in 1997. We were traveling from Barcelona into France with an itinerary first to see Rivesaltes, then to Besseige to search

out any signs of Rachel's mother's past and origins), then to the Cote D'Azur to visit St. Raphael, then Marseilles, and by train then to Bruxelles, to see my remaining two cousins and theirs as well as the city. For Karl it was a return to a city he discovered when he was sixteen, where he went to study cello for the summer with Edmond Baert, a then renown Belgian cellist, and in search and rediscovery of the cousins in question.

Night finally came. I came out of hiding and went directly to the train station. There were more people in the train station than I had anticipated, not a crowd, but at least there were not just a few of us which might have subjected me to closer scrutiny by some people looking for trouble. I may have waited half an hour within the station waiting room before we moved onto the platform to wait for the train. The wait then was not long; I liked the darker platform better than the more lighted station. I climbed onto the train. Quite soon we were off; Perpignan was not at the beginning of the line, many were already on board; I don't know from where.

The Train to Marseilles

The train was packed; standing room only! Where in the world was everyone going during this war? I actually preferred the fact that the train was crowded and I among others had to stand in the aisle. This was one of those passenger trains that has small compartments for about 6 people in each, with an aisle outside of these compartment on my left when I climbed in. I notched another step in my venture when the train took off. Now the trick again and still so far was to be as invisible as I could.

In a way it was easy because, even in the aisle we were standing quite in close proximity of one another and no one seemed to stand out to be looked at. I don't know how long we had traveled so far, one hour, two, more? We traveled surrounded by a

muffled sound of people in dialogue, over-ridden by the louder sound of the train running at a moderate clip. The trains did not run at the speed to which we are now accustomed in America, in Europe and elsewhere. I felt an odd feeling of near-peace, maybe it was sleepiness; I had been on my feet, had run like hell and walked a good number of kilometers and had not slept since many hours now. I had not dared fall asleep in the Perpignan public toilets. Nor had I eaten since my piece of bread in the morning. I really don't remember being hungry; I guess that without being conscious of it, I was set to not eat till I got to Marseilles the next morning. It was no problem; I was not thinking of sleep nor of food as I am now that I write about it. I was rather in a state of alertness somewhat dulled by the train's moving rhythm; you know how trains in transit feel. There was more space between my standing-room-only neighbor on my right than on my left. In fact the one on my left was well within two feet from me. He may have even been closer or moved closer because he quietly said to me, "*Je sais d'où tu viens*" ("I know where you're coming from.")

This time, I was scared to death. I had been running like hell, I was scared shitless much of the time up to now; this time I was petrified. I had not gone that far on my journey. To be sure, this was the end of me. I was never this close to filling my pants with the contents of my nearly empty gut. He must have sensed or seen it because he said, "*N'aies pas peur, n'aies pas peur.*" ("Don't be frightened.") He was reassuring. His tone gave me the courage to hesitantly look at him. "*T'as faim?*" ("Are you hungry?") Dramatically relieved by his look and tone, I nodded my head. He must have looked me over well and for some time to so sharply get to the core of my problems: I know where you're coming from and are you hungry? He was, I would guess from his observations and his approach to me, a fairly well-schooled man. He

knew, I did not, that we would soon be making a stop of substantial duration. Looking back on my journey, on a map, it is clear that our stop was in either Montpellier or Nîmes, another of the facts I can't remember. One fact I remember with distinction is that he provided me with my first meal in 9 months—in the train station restaurant. Like in train stations of years ago, the restaurant was in a rather large open gray hangar-like space, I felt uncertain still of my newly-met traveling companion, but his demeanor and what he did, in the end made me feel more than grateful to him. I ate—a whole meal. He didn't eat; he may have gotten a coffee. I don't remember what I ate; I know there was meat and vegetables. Rabbit or horse, I would guess. It was war. I was surprised when he pulled out his food ration book—first time I learned that food was being rationed in France—and the waiter tore out pieces of it as part payment for what I had consumed. Even then I realized that he had given me some of his monthly allotment of food. He did not look starved, but still, even people who weren't skinny like I was got hungry. He did not have to do this or anything; he could have just turned away and looked elsewhere. What I best remember is his sympathetic reach toward me, and what the man did. Other than that, a big “that”, there was nothing remarkable about him, an average enough office employee or businessman or who knows what. I also remember that he did seem to know what I was about, and that I felt protected with him in the station. He also helped me understand at least what some of the many travelers were doing on this train. He was among a number who were going to Grenoble to ski! While we were in concentration camps, some were skiing! Of course in the Alps you can ski in May; you can pretty well ski anytime. Not all such evil people either. Life just went on, even while so many of us were imprisoned and starving in camps! I suppose that a number of the passengers were going to Grenoble too, because when I re-

embarked on our train Perpignan-to-Marseilles, many seats were now available; many had transferred to trains going elsewhere—which is what makes me think this was Nimes and not Montpellier. From Nimes railways fan out, going further East-slightly-bearing-south along the Mediteranee coast to Marseilles, or fully north toward Paris and midway a twist East to Grenoble, or West toward Toulouse and Bordeaux. Not so for Montpellier. I ate in Nimes.

I was unpleasantly made aware of my arrival in Marseilles by the train ticket collector's not so gently waking me. I am not surprised that I had fallen asleep. To this day I don't know what went through his mind. I can't be sure whether he looked annoyed or just surprised. I guess he was just going through the wagon looking for, well maybe for passenger who like me had fallen asleep and had to get out. He might have wondered what hole did I come out of in such a state of dress. But scowling some, I thought, he just wakened me and seemed ready to move on. I quickly got out of the train; I didn't look back.

I had arrived in Marseilles, yet another successful large step in my plan. It must have been past 9 in the morning, as what followed would indicate. Even now I wonder why it took so long to get from Perpignan to Marseilles, from 11 or so p.m. to about 9 a.m. Except for the German army then, we did not travel then as fast as we do today. In any case, thank heaven, I got there. I knew the address I was looking for since I had left Rivesaltes, though I did search my pocket for the piece of paper on which I had written it. I asked someone, no doubt I selected a kindly disposed face, I didn't ask a gendarme or such figure, if he or she knew—can't remember if it was a man or a woman, I probably would have selected a woman—for the whereabouts and directions to my destination. My destination according to Vivette Samuel's *Sauver Les Enfants*,

the OSE Bureau in Marseilles, was on *rue de l'Italie*. Another piece of luck, the Bureau OSE was quite close to the train station and easily accessible. I'm pretty good with directions, so that was no problem. The problem, as it had been since I left Rivesaltes, was to get there without running into a life-spoiler. I got there.

CHAPTER 4

SAFETY – THE OSE HOMES

Le Bureau d' Oeuvre de Secours aux Enfants (OSE) – Marseilles

As soon as I entered the room, protective arms were around my shoulders. The return of the prodigal son, the return of Odysseus—except that I was unknown to them and they to me. But, what a welcome—home. I have felt this on a few occasions other than it really being home. I felt this “welcome home” in a strange land when I got to this OSE Bureau in Marseilles, and when I first visited Jerusalem, many years later. I don’t know whether it was one or two of several people in the Bureau who were immediately at my side. I doubt that I even said who I was or where I came from. They knew. Of course after that reception, I immediately told them who I was and where I had come from. It was 2 May, 1941. I was there for only a few hours. I am certain that they had been through this kind of thing before and by now the channels were well traveled: this kid we send to this OSE home or that. Most likely space availability and proximity to Marseilles determined which OSE home.

I had the good fortune of being sent to the home in Boulouris on the *Cote d’Azur*, between Toulon and Cannes, much closer to Cannes than Toulon.

Boulouris – *La Feuille*

The OSE home in Boulouris named *La Feuille* (the leaf) was an asylum and oasis, I mean asylum in the generic meaning of the word, not like it has been used to mean a protected hospital for mentally ill people. Almost from my first day there, the

protective ambiance, the people in it, the clearly caring social-service-type staff and the refugee kids like me, my insides calmed. The inner strain, not that gripping gut twisting I experienced escaping, but that entire body strain which had taken hold of me since we left Bruxelles—except for those three months in Village—left me. Even though I was separated from my mother, this felt really good; overnight I felt good. I felt that since I had escaped and did have the feeling that I was in protective custody by some power that could counter or at least withstand Vichy-France's miserable actions against Jews, I knew that my mother could escape and would do so soon. I felt good.

Boulouris, then, was no more than a village, not large enough to be considered a town. Now 60 years later, it is lost within the melding of one village to the next by the massive expansion of vacation homes and tourism on the Cote d'Azur. Boulouris was a haven, well deserving, then even more than now, of its reputable balm and beauty. *La Feuille* was situated on a curving small macadam road—the road elevating slightly from its origin to its meandering end somewhere—behind a low wall close to the road. One went into a rod iron-gate that I think was always open. A sandy-graveled substantial court was the entry area to the Home. It was an old, long established villa-type, with massive but house-proportioned stone and masonry structure. *La Feuille*, situated near the road, was set on a substantial piece of estate where many of our camp-like—wow, I mean “summer camp”-like, not the second-circle-in-hell-camp I just left behind—activities took place.

As best as I can remember, the staff consisted of perhaps 3 social-worker type adults, one man probably in his late 20s or 30s, we called Mora, one woman a few years younger than him called Aranka, and one senior woman by the name of Masour, we called her Madame Masour. I don't know why we called her “*Madame Masour*”,

prefaced by the formal “*Madame*” and her last name—I learned from Vivette Samuel that she was indeed Germaine Masour, a social worker [I think] who spent 20 years serving the OSE—whereas we called the other two by their first names [I think it was their first names], Mora and Aranka. I guess we sensed that *Madame Masour* was the head of the outfit, even though, I am left with the feeling that we did not see her with the everyday regularity with which we saw Mora and Aranka. Madame Masour was a warm, dignified lady who could be casual, caregiving, and comforting with you. She really conveyed a sense of secure and committed shouldering of responsibility for us; she was admirable. Mora, I hate to admit, was my favorite. He was warm, kind, engaged with us I felt 24 hours a day. So was his co-worker, Aranka; actually, I really liked Aranka too.

Also memorable were two other women we saw daily. Inez was the chef, homemaker, grounds-keeper, you name it, she did it. She was warm, friendly, kind and always very nicely responsive to interchanges with me, and from what I saw, the others as well. I think she would have liked to be a man because she cropped her hair short like a man’s—which was not in style then—and she wore men’s clothes—also not in style then. I say this only to convey my world then. And Inez had the cutest all-chores assistant named Julie or Julia. She was about 19 or 20. She was not only pretty and lively, but she too was very pleasant with the kids.

Now, I am not just exaggerating when I seem to say that all these staff were really warm, caring, protective people. They were. Whether they were that way in their private lives, I have no idea. But I say they were so with us. It may be that, in addition to their just being very nice people, the life circumstances we all experienced made for the kind of mutual caring and positive relatedness among us. Other than for Inez and

Julia who were from the region, we were a persecuted lot, the staff may have felt we are in a time of war, injustice, maltreatment, and hardship, and they were committed to make life as good for us as they could. They knew our lot, the kids'. Each of us was a "war-orphan" for the time being. Some may then already have become "war-orphans" for always. Some of us were so only temporarily. And this was what made the ambiance what I experienced it to be, a haven in which we were cared for and surrounded by devoted, good-hearted, responsible grown-ups.

The kids there constituted the largest factor of and contributed to the character and quality of this environment. I may have come away from my experience in the OSE home(s)—there was another one I'll get to shortly—biased favorably beyond its merits. But I do not think so. Whether we felt we were all in this boat together, which we were, or what benevolent forces were at play in this time of malevolence toward us, we kids got along. I'm sure there must have been the normal childhood rivalries, envies and jealousies. We all had suffered much fear, threat, distress, let alone now nearly one year of hunger, homelessness, loss of family, and more, and there was very good psychological explanation for the accumulation of plenty of hostility within us, each of us. But it did not get expressed toward one another. It may have when I wasn't there, yes. But then I never heard about or heard any talk of fights between two kids, two boys or two girls. We were living in unusual times, in fact for Jews and other persecuted minorities these were awful times and they were yet to become as bad as we all know they got. Maybe the unusual times did it. The best I can come up with now for this remarkable peaceful co-existence within a population that quite normally could be expected to at times at least come to clashes, is that we were all turning toward one another with good will, almost to protect ourselves and one another against a common

dreaded external enemy. Anna Freud and Dorothy Burlingham, two Child Psychoanalysts in London at the time, found and later reported how among very young war-orphans, even two and three year-olds turned to help each other in times of distress among any one of them. The type of explanation I just put forward has been given by psychology-types. I think the explanation has much merit.

But as I think of it today, perhaps yet another thing operating in my experience then made my being in the OSE home so positive. There were stark differences between Ricibidou-Rivesaltes on one hand, and Boulouris-St.Raphael on the other. The most stark was this: when we left Belgium, we had sought asylum in France and we were treated with shameful indignity and incarcerated in two stopping stations on the way into hell; we were put there against our will by reasons of malignant distortions about us, by malignant prejudice. And then, trusting my mother's wisdom and wishes, when I sought asylum at the Bureau OSE, I got genuine asylum, not prison and rationalized, programmed degradation. As I look back and try to grasp the differences in what I experienced in Rivesaltes as compared to St. Raphael—*La Villa Mariana*—, in Rivesaltes I was dumped into muddy gray misery—hell is not just fire—whereas in St.Raphael, even separated from my mother, I felt I was in a protecting, caring, and even healing, environment.

There were about 18 to 25 kids in the home. Most were between the ages of 6 and 14. The two oldest among us, two girls about 13, 14. Though we were all together in most activities from eating to just lulling about, these girls were somewhat separate from the rest of us, I don't know just why. Maybe because they were really starting to become young women, in terms of their body changes. Of course, boys and girls slept in separate rooms, rooms of boys and rooms of girls; there was no large dormitory-like

room. There was increasing familiarity among us since there were no kids leaving and there were no new arrivals after I got there. When I got there the kids seemed already to be a group with some cohesion though, true, more the boys with the boys and the girls with the girls.

We ate together. Food was no doubt scarce even among people who were not interned in concentrations camps, as I learned in the restaurant in the Nimes train station. I have doubts though that most French in Vichy-France were eating as little as we were. And I am certain that some people were eating quite handsomely, and even elegantly. There must have been some explanation why dinner often consisted of only one vegetable; and why that particular vegetable featured as dinner day after day. Fortunately, not rutabagas or turnips. Actually, a very good vegetable to my taste, chickpeas, was the one I remember best. We had chickpeas many times. Food portions, of minimalist dimensions, were much like in Rivesaltes but somehow it seemed altogether more bearable. We ate the little we ate in our OSE “home”, not in hell. It may also be that by now I had come to not expect more. And eating in the home was not an isolated, hoarding type of experience. We were all together, talking, laughing, eating chickpeas in a caring, congenial environment. This is not so surprising to me. We know in my line of work that the emotional environment in which the child is fed is more critical than what the child is fed, so long as there is enough to meet the child’s needs. Well, I found out that this can happen even if there isn’t enough to meet the child’s need. We all go a long way on emotional fueling. I really don’t recall any complaints of being hungry, of wanting more than one was getting. There may have been; I didn’t seeing any. Was this factual? Is it my wishfully ameliorating what it was like? That is possible. But I have to trust what I remember. As we say in my work,

within actuality-bound limits, the reality that one perceives is psychologically more real than the actual reality. Sometimes that's good; sometimes that's bad. It's like *Rashomon* where three observers of the same reality report it quite differently; but none of them invents that a murder happened. On that, they were in accord. The Holocaust happened! I didn't dream it.

Speaking of eating one of the things I, and no doubt we all, enjoyed there was joining in on the various harvests of edibles that occurred in the regions at their appropriate times of the year. One I associate with Boulouris was the fig harvesting. I may be wrong but I associate figs with Boulouris and grapes with St.Raphael. Whether it was in Boulouris or St.Raphael, I do see myself in a fig tree gathering figs, gently when they feel soft, even more gently when they are not yet soft so as not to disturb them, and less restrained when they are full-bellied and though close to ripe ready for the picking, by the hands-full, eating some and putting some in a basket. Everyone knows figs and fig-tree leaves. But not everyone knows that some fig trees are small and some are large. These were large—for a fig tree—and you climbed into them to get the fruit. We had earned that work opportunity, gathering luscious fruit, when we were near-starving. But like with everything else in life, too much of a good thing tended to back-fire. With figs as compared to grapes—which I'll get to shortly—a belly ache is more likely than diarrhea for which grapes are well known. These were really good figs, whether you were hungry or not. I must say though that I have infrequently met a fig that was not really good.

Given my skin reaction—which has indeed nearly all cleared now in the course of this writing—I must say a few words about our sleeping accommodations. We each had a single normal bed (not thick wires stretched between two-by-fours), with a real

everyday mattress (not a straw-filled skin excoriating sac), we had sheets and blanket(s), for me, the sheet protecting me against attack on my skin vulnerability to direct contact with wool. For me, this was not just a trivial difference between Rivesaltes and the OSE Boulouris-St.Raphael home.

Another notable difference between the OSE home and the multiple-misery-dimensioned camp was that in the OSE home I was provided with clean clothes and a pair of shoes. All who are not accustomed to walking barefoot—not that this would have been possible in the cold of winter in Southern France which I remind us is situated approximately at the latitude of Boston and Chicago—and who have no regular leather shoes, whether theirs are made of wood or of blanket material, know what a marvel a regular pair of shoes can be. It makes me think of those war movies where soldiers in the field of battle will rob the dead of their shoes or boots; in time, shoes do wear out. By the time I arrived in Boulouris, my blanket-cloth shoes were ready for the trash can; happily they gave me a decent pair of leather shoes. Of course, even though the double layers of clothes I put on to travel from Perpignan to Marseilles lasted me for some time beyond my arrival in Boulouris, in due time I was supplied with a very reasonable wardrobe accommodating me quite well in accordance with changes in seasonal climate.

For reasons I can only guess at, actually they may have been positive reasons, we moved from Boulouris to the environs of St.Raphael, some 5 to 10 kilometers closer to Cannes. This may have been in July or even as late as August 1941. Several possible reasons present themselves. First, I think that the estate, I would call it, into which we moved, *La Villa Mariana*, was larger and better situated for a bunch of children than was *La Feuille*. For instance, getting to a swimming cove tailor-made for

kids, a really magnificent and protected jewel of Mediteranee/Cote d'Azur—I see it now and will always remember it for its unique beauty and variety of water offerings including water play in shallow areas, deep swimming areas around the horseshoe shaped cove, protected from the outside world by magnificent walls of rocks on each side that rose to one hundred feet above water from which now and then someone would do a breath-taking swan-dive, an awesome sight—was less than a mile from La Villa Marianna. Second, once the school term started, I think in September, we were registered to go to school, and the school in St.Raphael was located within reasonable walking distance from *La Villa Mariana*, whereas getting to school from Boulouris would have been much more difficult. Exactly when we moved, I don't know. Perhaps two or so months of my getting to Boulouris. I liked *La Feuille*, but I liked *La Villa Mariana* more.

St.Raphael – *La Villa Mariana*

La Villa Mariana was a nearly-cubic structure, quite elegantly large, only in shape, I would say with a good deal of sand stone or stucco blocks used as, on a smaller scale, bricks might have been. It was really a lovely old, I thought then a quite large Villa. I have a photo of Julie sitting on the banister of the broad front porch. To move there in the summer time—today I might think of it as going for a summer on the Cote d'Azur. That's today. But even then, in 1941, even with the threat of Nazism, German, French, Italian, Hungarian Nazism and, European in brief, on a *pois chiches* (chick peas) diet, with the ambiance we brought from Boulouris, all of us together, no one being left behind, it was lovely. Amazing how, being away from Rivesaltes-on-the-way-to-hell, could make *La Villa Mariana*, with the people and the emotional surround

we all brought to it, even without my mother there . . . could make *La Villa* be such a haven. I am not the only one to speak of the OSE homes this way; there were quite a number of us, kids then, who found the same life-saving experience there.

Other than being translocated from Boulouris to St.Raphael, it was the same OSE universe. No character changes, no ambiance changes, only the physical surround. But I do remember the surround quite well. I will admit to the possibility, the probability, that in some details I am mistaken. Wait! In no way do I mean that I am inventing anything. I am inventing nothing. It happened. This story happened. The details are somewhat trivial against the facts that are, I know, unequivocal: the Germans marched into Belgium, we ran for asylum to France, we went to Village, then we were ordered by the powers-that-be, the government of Vichy-France via the local *gendarmerie* (police), to show up in an appointed place at an appointed time in Toulouse, then were transported to Ricibidou, then Rivesaltes, and I escaped from that stop-toward-hell hole. The details to which I am referring are: where did we get heat in Rivesaltes? Was there heat? Was there a pot-bellied stove? Was there one in Ricibidou? Of that I am not as certain as I like to be. I have written what I have imbedded in memory and believe I experienced; this is not an invention. If I am mistaken about some details, I am not about the picture.

I do remember a number of things about St.Raphael, even to my own amazement, that in that time of hell made life bearable for me. Life bearable even though, in St.Raphael, I was separated from my mother—the sole member out of my large Polish family, two families of 6 to 12 children each on average, to escape to France with me—, those who made up St. Raphael made life actually better than just bearable, in a number of ways they even made it lovely. I will remember St.Raphael

always; but the way it was then, the way it still was in 1953 when I visited there and took a few photographs; not the way it was when we visited in 1997 when it was saturated with houses and milling people and snarling traffic, in ways typical of many vacationing areas today.

Thank heaven the sleeping accommodations did not change from Boulouris to St.Raphael except for the place, the location. My group of boys, it may actually have been all the boys, were housed for sleeping purposes in a small house-like structure separated from the Villa proper, like a larger than average garage or carriage-house. The entire structure was committed to being our small dormitory. It was situated at the left side of the entrance of the “estate” in front of the Villa. The girls’ sleeping area was in the *Villa*. Nor did the diet change from Boulouris to St.Raphael. Actually, it’s at *La Villa Mariana* that I especially remember the *pois chiches* (chickpeas). But I do remember distinctly a time when our diet was temporarily modified.

I suppose it was in late September or early October 1941 that we were invited to supplement our chickpeas diet with grapes. It was grape-harvesting season and a substantial vineyard owner welcomed cheap help to make his harvesting feasible. We learned from one of guardians Aranka, Mora, or Mme Masour that the grape-grower had asked for help and was looking to hire some of the hardier kids who would be willing to work, for some small monetary remuneration in his vineyard. The contract as I think of it today probably was something like, help us with our grape harvest and we’ll pay you a small amount of money for your labor. In addition, and this was the drawing card, you can eat all the grapes you want. Wow. Tell starving kids they can eat all the grapes they want. I remember, we went with enthusiasm both in grape-picking, and not

so wisely, in grape-eating. It really was a pretty good deal, quite pleasant in fact, except for the price we paid, diarrhea!

One of the everyday highlights in St.Raphael was that we went to school, to an established French school. I liked school from my earliest beginnings in it; I took to studying and learning well from the start. The war hit Belgium just after I had finished fifth grade. Since then, May 1940, the next time I had anything like school probably, was the last month we were in Ricibidou, I would say October-November 1940. A group of grown-ups from among the interned in Ricibidou organized a few classes a week, which I attended and constituted a genuine effort to keep the children's learning and studies going. To what degree the classes continued with regularity, how large the classes were, what grade levels were taught, all that I cannot say. But I can see the school we attended in St.Raphael. I can see it in the fall, trees with browning leaves; a long-standing, typical, anywhere-in-Europe school; a gray but not drab, in fact, quite pleasant, school-adjacent play ground or school yard; the school itself too a gray-but-not-drab structure there already for many a decade.

I guess I really liked being a Boy Scout in St.Raphael; it really was not as good in Ricibidou. Why I liked not only school, but the march there and back to *La Villa*, is stacked with reasons. First of all, in that day, 1941-1942, marching-walking as we did along the shoreline, on a two-way semi-macadam road, lined with palm trees, a magnificent sun in fall, winter, and spring, this of itself made it memorable. Then add the fact that, since I was one of the older elementary school age kids, and evidently, Mora, Aranka, and Mme Masour thought me capable of taking the group of about sixteen to twenty of us to school and made me Scout-leader, for want of a better term. I was made responsible to march us all to school in the morning, a distance of perhaps 6

to 8 kilometers (3 to 5 miles) and then, mid-afternoon, back to La Villa after school. Even in winter I don't remember any terrible weather day. It could be that given all the misery we were all going through, Mother Nature gave us a break. I must say what I, to this day, think was possibly the best part of it is the way we agreed to sing as we marched to and from school. I suspect we sang better in the morning going to school than in the afternoon after having labored there. It could be that we were then quite tired, mid-afternoon, kids who were skinnied by not enough food for many months by now, since September 1940, and here we were marching to school from September 1941 to March 1942. I say with some assurance that we sang more in the morning on the way to school than on the way back.

To this day I see us marching, boy-scout fashion, not military fashion, that is, not crisp, not regulated, not so in step to the beat, singing as we went.

“Une fleur au chapeau, a la bouche une chanson,

Un coeur joyeux et sincere,

Et c'est tout ce qu'il faut a nos filles et nos garcons

Pour aller au bout de la terre.

Vous qui nous regardez passer sous le soleil et sous l'orage,

Peut-etre bien que vous pensez que nous avons bien du courage

(A flower in your cap, a song on your lips,

A heart joyous and sincere,

And that is all that is needed of our daughters and sons

To go to the end of the earth.

You who watch us passing by under the sun and in storms,

Perhaps you think we have a good deal of courage)

And there were others like,

Un kilometre a pied, ca use, ca use,

Un kilometre a pied, ca use les souliers.

(One kilometer on foot, that uses, that uses,

One kilometer on foot, that uses up your shoes.)

A progression of funny repetitive refrains go to the point of you wearing down your toes. The song was funny then, but it would not have been if I had been invited to sing it when I had only cloth shoes.

There were more boys than girls, in *La Villa*. In fact, there were about 12 boys close to my age; I was among the older of them, most of the others were anywhere from 1 to 3 years younger than I. From my experience, as I said before, we got along fine. I remember it as, I guess, normalizing that we would gather in the morning at *La Villa* and march to school and that we would quite predictably meet in the school yard for the march back to *La Villa*. There was a nice feel about it—at least for me and I know for two of my closer friends, Armand and (I can't remember the other's name). I do recall a couple of younger kids who seemed quite more troubled than the rest of us, I don't know why. But no doubt, they had their reasons.

Through the cloud of years, I remember the classroom they put me in, just large enough to accommodate maybe 25 to 30 individual student desks, accommodating just about that number of students. Just continuing my pattern of doing well in school in Bruxelles, I did well in school in St.Raphael; in France in that day like in Belgium, the three top-graders got honors; being second, I remember, brought me much pleasure. This is where I memorized "*Le Corbeau et le Renard*" (The Crow and the Fox) by Jean de la Fontaine—which I remember to this day and delighted our middle son, Karl, when

he was taking French in high school, in waking him some mornings by reciting it to him, with due characterization and inflection, of course. I enjoyed it as much as he, at the very least, as he would smile even before opening his eyes, probably entertaining me as much as I did him. Even to this day, mention of it by either of us makes us smile.

As I said before, there were two quite pretty older girls in our OSE group of kids; they were probably 13 or 14. Their development suggested that. Of course, I tried to impress them, as did Armand, and several others among us “older” 11 and 12 year olds. One of my efforts to impress them met with some near-disaster. Of all places, this near-disaster took place in the beautiful swimming cove in St. Raphael. When they asked me if I could swim, of course, I told them I could. They could; how could I tell them that I could not when it really looked a no-brainer; why, all you need to do is flop your arms and legs around. So they innocently enough invited me to join them in what turned out to be the “deep end” of the cove, if one can think of it that way. I very quickly learned that the no-brainer of knowing how to swim was, while perhaps not requiring great skill, nonetheless required a necessary minor capability I had never had occasion to develop. Fortunately, they were nice kids, and didn’t let me drown. I am guessing that as soon as they realized that I had hoped I could swim but could not, they rescued me. Perhaps they were sufficiently satisfied, as many girls are, when they see a boy who has to uphold his macho foolishness which he mistakes for dignity and manliness, has to face the fact that he really is not that big and capable. They were even solicitous; impressive generosity on their part. And we remained friends; and though I well deserved it, they didn’t tease me even once.

Life went on in St. Raphael as it also had in Riversaltes. This time life’s going on took the shape of, of all indignities visited on me by my own body, my having an

inguinal hernia. It had never come up before. But I guess I must've had some abdominal symptoms or I felt some uncomfortable bulging in the lower left hand quadrant of my abdomen, as we say in medicine, for this problem to be uncovered. Very simple and not very successful treatment then, though I have seen such in movies of the 19th century: bed rest and a support-belt like contraption that is intended to contain abdominal contents within the abdominal wall. It's not regaling to further describe, so I won't. Altogether it was not pleasant, but it was not so bad.

But there are things that matter more to a boy than just some abdominal ailment problems like the one I just described. St.Raphael is among other things, the place where I had my first girlfriend, Sara. It was not a serious affair. It did though, bring with it very nice discoveries and feelings. I can almost see her. But I do remember distinctly that feeling that having a girlfriend, in my series of six in my romantic life history, brought with it for me. This is not the place to go into details. That it is a very nice feeling, very nice, is enough for me to say here.

I turned 13 at the end of December 1941. I was 11 when the war started for Belgium; since then where we went we did so in transit to somewhere yet undetermined. I take this narrative break here to take note of the fact that, of course as a Jewish boy, turning 13 is a significant traditional occasion. It's the day they say when "you become a man". This is, as so many know, when a Jewish boy has his Bar Mitzvah; in Europe, during the 1930s, 1940s, girls did not similarly celebrate their Bat Mitzvah—simple male chauvinism so prevalent among Jews in the Europe of that day. But during these war years, there was no talk of Bar Mitzvahs around me, not mine, not anyone else's that I know of. I had been reared in an Orthodox home where food laws were observed, Holidays were observed, so was the *Shabbat*, though my mother and I

or my Aunt Esther and my cousin Joseph with whom we lived, did not attend Friday evening or Saturday religious services. My Uncle Frenkel, my favorite uncle and family, where my mother and I spent many a *Shabbat* dinner and with whom we had increased contact after my mother and Aunt Esther parted ways, was a quite religious man who set *Tvillen* twice daily and prayed. I attended *Shul* (Synagogue) with him on a number of occasions and was significantly positively influenced by him, though I never gained his fervor for the classical religious man's attending to daily prayer and ritual. While feeling deeply Jewish from my earliest years, I never felt deeply religious. I know that in my younger years in Bruxelles, I "believed in God" as we say; but I was not avidly interested in prayer.

But everything was turned upside down with this war. For many of us. I turned 13 while at *La Villa*, but there was no question of a Bar Mitzvah. I was not thinking Bar Mitzvah; I doubt anyone else in my environs was thinking, or at least no one even raised the question with me; and I certainly did not raise the question. And, my mother was not there. When my mother and I parted with my escape from Rivesaltes, we had not talked about the fact that I would be turning 13 in eight months. Maybe she didn't dare talk about it with me because she was not certain that we might be reunited by that time. I didn't think of my having a Bar Mitzvah at the end of the year; given our life condition, a Bar Mitzvah was not a pressing thought for me, we had far more mundane survival matters on our minds, at least I did. In my universe of the time, other than compliments of the Rivesaltes authorities who acknowledged our Jewishness by degrading our miserable living conditions further in honor of our Passover 1941 observation, there were no religious observations. For me and those around me, there had been no religious observations that I know of in Ricibidou, nor in Rivesaltes, nor in

La Villa, Holidays observations yes, though not with religious services, and I knew of no Sabbath services.

So my 13th birthday came and passed silently. I don't recall anyone's birthday being observed in *La Villa Mariana*.

I had been in the OSE home since May 2, 1941. Some time in March 1942, I believe it was Mme Masour—though it might have been Mora, I think not—sought me out to talk to me. With some seriousness but also a good feeling, Mme Masour told me that I was to leave St.Raphael to go to America. I did not initially grasp what she was saying. How is this, I would be going to America? What was I to make of this? How did this come about? Mme Masour told me that my mother, from within Rivesaltes had signed me onto a list for children to go to America. On inquiry, she told me that no my mother was not going to go with me; that my mother wanted me to go with other children. She could not go too. What next? I can imagine what I would feel now, and think it very likely that I didn't know how I felt about this. I had no access to my mother, so we couldn't talk about it. I did feel, no doubt, looking back, that she would have had a strong argument for me to go, that she wanted me to go. Like she had presented me with regard to escaping from Riversaltes. Escape from Rivesaltes that's one thing; that she would also escape from Rivesaltes I found believable. If I could do it, it was automatic that she could do it too. Was my mother going to come to America too, separately, later? Mme Masour did not seem to know. Or, as her behavior indicated, so I thought. I say this now knowing from Vivette Samuel's book that at this time, beyond January 1942, the OSE was outright committed to separating children from their parents even in the concentration camps, even in Rivealtes where vivette Samuel volunteered to be interned; they did so in an attempt to rescue children from

slaughter by separating them from their parents and sending them to homes and eventually to real asylum like to America. Mme Masour probably knew that the reason I was going to America was that the OSE knew that the Jews in France and elsewhere were targeted for extermination—the Wannsee Conference that unleashed “the final solution” had taken place on January 20 of this year. Children who stayed with their mothers—children under 13 since those older than 13 were by legislation separated from them, an ironic recognition of Jewish ritual [Bar Mitzvah]—were slaughtered along with her. We were now in March 1942; the slaughter was going on; Mme Masour knew; but understandably she would not tell me that. Mme Masour was very sympathetic, really; she didn’t try to avoid my obvious dilemma; she just repeated some phrases, conveying to me that this is what my mother wanted me to do and that this was a very good thing to do. As I reconstruct a bit what happened, Vivette Samuel, an OSE worker, then voluntarily, heroically, interned in Rivesaltes exactly to serve the internees, managed to inform parents of the possibility of sending their children to safety in America. I assume that this is how my mother put my name on such a list, and why I was going to America. Mme Masour, withstanding my questions with patience and kindness, did not promise that my mother would follow me, she did not know. In the end, again, I accepted my mother’s assignment.

The days that followed are a blur. It may be that by the time it did come time for me to go, that the school year was terminating. It had been a good year. I had done very well, holding my second in the class position to the end. I had had the sense that my attendance in that school was temporary, and it was. Of course, it quickly got known in our small Villa community that I was going to America. I don’t remember any great cheerfulness at my going, nor any envy by anyone of my assignation; what I

remember were goodbye interactions, a few photo exchanges, assumptions that we would see each other again. I also remember well Mora's taking over the task of trying to facilitate my taking to the idea of going to America, and his efforts in making it sound like a cheerful and lucky prospect. He took it on himself to try to teach me a few words of English. I remember a dialogue he developed with me, of course with my input. Writing and speaking in English it went something like: "Hello, Henri, how are you?" "Oh, hello Mora, I am very well thank you. I am a doctor now." "Oh, Henri, that is wonderful." Not a brilliant conversation, but it carried Mora's efforts to make me feel that the prospect of my going to America was a very good idea and would end up to be a successful undertaking. In part, Mora succeeded. I did feel ready to go, though just where, I was not sure. When the time came, I believe in about mid-or-late-March, here, as compared to my exodus from Rivesaltes, the goodbyes were out in the open, with mixed feelings on my part and on that of some of my kid friends, Sara and Armand especially. The grown ups, Mme Masour, Mora, Aranka, Inez, and Julia all seemed very certain and cheerful about what I was doing. They all really sent me off with warm good wishes; they were palpable.

CHAPTER 5

GOING TO AMERICA

Our Brief Sojourn in Marseilles

I can't remember who brought me to Marseilles, I guess I can say, "brought me back" to Marseilles. Struggling to remember if it was Mme Masour or Mora, I come up uncertain though I am inclined toward guessing it was Mme Masour. My return to Marseilles was under very different circumstances than my first-time arrival there. I was not returning from St.Raphael to Marseilles the conquering hero, but I also was not returning the runaway prisoner. I returned to Marseilles in safe hands. The place to which I returned was not the OSE Bureau itself, but it was in some way part of it. There were dormitory and feeding accommodations, not that there was any more food here than in St.Raphael. Also like St.Raphael, that same warm protective surround was there although there also was a clear feeling of transience in it. It was clear that we would not be here long; we knew that were here as a starting point to our going to America.

I am also not certain who came here first. I do remember well my immeasurable surprise when I saw him. Just as he was in Rivesaltes, even though this was a year after my escape from there, there stood my Rivesaltes friend-musketeer, Savic. We saw each other at the same moment; one of us walked into the room where the other was; a momentous reunion had occurred. Savic and I were going to America together! What an unbelievable moment. I was not going to America knowing no one; my Rivesaltes friend was going too. I knew I was going with other kids; I was not going totally alone.

But I knew none of them. That now was changed. Savic and I had known each other in Rivesaltes for 5 months. Under conditions like those that prevailed in that camp, you can be with others for months and know no one, or you can be with one of them for a few days and endow that person with specialness. Savic was special. Evidently we were so to one another.

We were photographed for our visa and exit papers. In my photograph I think I look quite nice, with a blazer and a white shirt, with my shirt collar draped over the blazer neck-part, European style of that day. But my eyes have the look that, according to Judy Kestenberg and Ira Brenner⁴, a Warsaw ghetto doctor, Dr. Adina Blady Szwajger, found and reported that she saw many “children emaciated by hunger, ‘with the eyes of adults’.” I know what she meant. As we were being prepared for the voyage to America, among the many steps those who were shepherding us were taking, one stands out. I am totally ignorant as to how the OSE and whoever else was involved—I believe the American Quakers were involved too—worked it out. It was that, by bus they brought the parents of those among us who had not seen them for some time all the way from Rivesaltes to Marseilles to say goodbye. I don’t know whether they did the same for children whose parents were in other camps; it may be that a number of the children were war-orphans. What I do know is that I was stunned when they informed me that my mother would come to say goodbye. How did they do that? Why would she have to go back? I just did not understand this craziness. It was only much later that I realized that negotiations by social service-type groups, as well as international organizations like the Red Cross, the American Quakers, and who knows who else had negotiated with Vichy-France to permit the children to leave this misery-embroiled country, but that their parents had to stay!

⁴ *The Last Witness: The Child Survivor of the Holocaust* by Judith S. Kestenberg and Ira Brenner published by the American Psychiatric Press, Washington DC, 1996, page 134.

I have to wonder if I was stunned because I had not anticipated that the OSE might go to such lengths or be able to do so, to bring my mother out of Rivesaltes just to say goodbye. Or was I stunned because of the implication that effort contained. The OSE felt it important that my mother and I say goodbye. I was not ready to say the type of goodbye that, looking back on it, the OSE had in mind. I expected that my mother would follow me. Out of Rivesaltes and even to America, if this is where I was going. My impression is that there were not so many parents who came to say goodbye. I assume that in the case of Savic and others like him who came directly from Rivesaltes, he, and the others, had said their good-byes before leaving them, in Rivesaltes.

It was so good to see my mother. We were so happy to see and feel each other. Many questions were asked by each of us. This is when I learned, from her, that she had in fact escaped from Rivesaltes. But she had not communicated with me since she herself could not write—in the early 1900s, Polish girls from merchant families did not go to school—and she could not turn to anyone to write for her, which is why I had not heard from her or known of her escape. She was found, I suppose by the police, quite possibly due to the identifying papers she carried or by having been reported by some loyal French citizen, and was returned to Rivesaltes. The visit is a blur now; it seems to have been just momentary—though no doubt it lasted a number of hours. That I experience it as a blur now surely reflects the conflicting mix of feelings that came with having to say goodbye. I understand those among us who don't like good-byes enough

to want to avoid them, or cut them off quickly, and leave without looking back. I don't do that; I am not sure though that I did not do that then. But the problem is this. When we said goodbye, I had it in mind that my mother and I would be re-united, "where", did not come into my thinking. It did not occur to me that this might not be the case. It was a bit more than a decade later that I learned that with this visit I had seen my mother for the last time. It might have been better if I had known. But none of us was privy to that. I certainly did not consider that it might be the last time I would see her. The next thing I knew, we were embarking on *Le Marechal Liautey*.

Marseilles to Casablanca

Le Marechal Liautey, the ship that would take us for the first of two legs of our trip, I later learned was the flagship of a major Mediterranean commercial line with home-port in Marseilles. We were not treated to its more luxurious travel levels; we went into the belly of the ship. We were on deck when we left port; it was a sight seeing this large ship ease its way out of its limited parking space and then to see the port move away. I have always marveled at large vehicles moving about, at large buildings—I really had one of those surprises of a lifetime at the end of our Atlantic crossing, New York—, large bridges. Soon after we were out of port, I got reminded that I had never been on a ship that size nor had I traveled on the high seas before, nor had I planned for what I got. I was shocked and dismayed at what, after several hours of it, I felt was an absolutely unconquerable sea-sickness. I was really surprised by this "sea-sickness." I had not been warned that this might happen; I guess those responsible for us had many other things in mind and to deal with. For the uninitiated, what causes sea-sickness, I say not as a physician, but as a kid who first comes face to face with it,

or rather who first feels it take over his body, from the pit of your belly up, is that the ship won't sit still. It just keeps going up and down, endlessly, mercilessly. This up and down movement feels like waves of feeling your insides mount up inside your body and then slowly, sickeningly sink; up, down, up, down, slowly, just at the right rate to make you sick. I was not the only one; but I felt sure that I was one of the best models of this transient disorder. While we were awake I spent more time in the latrine throwing up than on deck. I don't know how or whether I slept that night. Needless to say, I was totally unable to even think of eating anything. For the uninitiated let me say that even if you are starving, you don't want to put anything destined for your sick-stomach into your mouth. Fortunately the next day we arrived in Casablanca. I was very happy to get off the ship, not happy with joy, happy to not feel seasick. What a relief to again be on soil that didn't move—well, I mean on soil that by virtue of gravity and its being in a solid state one does not feel moving.

I was also beginning to feel a mix of residual physiological malaise and excitement at what was happening to us. Talk around me seemed to turn to America and with it, excitement about going to this land of ease and good stuff, even then no one was so stupid as to say milk and honey, but strikingly close to that. I think now, that despite a psychological baseline, a constant state of feeling traumatized and low-level depressed, we all did a pretty good job of avoiding talking—probably also avoiding thinking—about what we had just left behind, most especially for those of us who had them, our parents. We didn't even talk of leaving Rivesaltes or other camps, nor of leaving OSE homes; we were bent, it seems now, on looking ahead, on going to America. It was not difficult coming from Europe in those days, and certainly not under the conditions that surrounded us, to think of America as the land where things

would be good, you could even get rich. I guess we might have meant that it was a land of opportunity, as it still is today, but I guess, as kids coming to America penniless it may not be surprising that opportunity translated into getting rich. After all, we were just kids. And maybe that explains why we didn't talk of going to America for the reason so many had gone to America for, long before we did and have since: because they don't have pogroms and they don't persecute Jews the way they do in Europe, nor do they persecute Catholics or Protestants of any denomination; then they only persecuted and acted criminally against Blacks, Negroes to be in keeping with the times. And since this is post "September 11", while Blacks are being persecuted less are Americans, are we, looking to another ethnic group to afflict with malignant prejudice?

To listen to it, our conversations were not elegant; we were kids. In fact, we were 50 kids being escorted to America by one adult couple. Remarkable that we were shepherded to America by one couple, one man and one woman. Of course there were no little kids among us, we were all from about 7 to 16 years of age, and we seemed to know the seriousness of our mission because we were quite cooperative. In fact, I am not aware of any kind of discipline problem, any behaviors impossible for one couple to handle—all said with enormous appreciation for that couple that brought us to America. We were 50 kids, I think mostly Jewish kids, but there were also some Spanish kids, refugees without parents or whose parents, like my mother, wanted their kids out of Europe, a continent that seemed then to be going to hell. We were 50 refugee children being brought to America by some very good community-minded people, very good people like Social Services people, certainly Jewish Social Services, American Quakers, Eleanor Roosevelt, and others, I assume for a better life.

We were in Casablanca for several days only, ready to go as soon as we learned that a Portuguese vessel, as was planned, would come by Casablanca to pick us up, perhaps others as well, and then cross the Atlantic to New York City, the land of many good things. We really just waited. We stayed pretty well confined to our temporary station—which I cannot see at all. In retrospect it would really have been neat to go to “Rick’s” and maybe catch a glimpse of Ingrid Bergman or Humphrey Bogart. No, no Casba, no Charles Boyer or Hedi Lamar. Just in some refuge from which we didn’t venture out, for reasons totally unknown to me. I believe we were traveling with Vichy-France’s knowledge and acquiescence, I doubt we had their blessings. Perhaps it was simply that it would have been quite a task for one couple to take 50 kids to the beach for some water play. Whatever the reasons, we pretty much stayed put.

Once my residual seasickness malaise fully subsided hunger made itself felt as usual. My recollection is that in Casablanca, we had no more food at our disposal than before. I have strong evidence for that; it came in the next stage of our voyage to America. That next stage was announced to us as good news. We were going to America the next day or so, on a Portuguese ship, named the *Serpa Pinta*, for us it was *Le Serpa Pinta*. Not knowing Portuguese, I don’t know what that name means though, right or wrong, I translated it into “The Python”.

Across the Atlantic – Casablanca to New York

We embarked on *Le Serpa Pinta*, same class as before, in the belly of the ship. It was not bad, it was just the ship’s lower class traveling accommodations. It was fine; no complaints. Though more cramped than where we had come from, certainly than *La*

Villa Mariana, even more than Rivesaltes, be assured I did not complain about our voyage quarters, nor did I hear any complaints from other kids.

We knew this was wartime; we had been in it now for 2 years—a long time for a kid 11 to 13. This was probably late March 1942. The newest major change in the war then that we were all aware of was that now, America was in the war too, and of course, on our side. I bring this into view now because it had serious implications for crossing the Atlantic on its surface rather than flying over it as most of us have done now for half a century. Up to the 1950s, and even later, one crossed the Atlantic hugging the surface of the water, by ship. Even we kids knew about submarines; they like things that hug the water; that's their scavenging site. And I think we were told that we would be safe because we were traveling on a Portuguese ship, a ship from a neutral country, a ship that would not be a target for submarines. Of course, no one said some mistake could happen. But even if someone had told us that, I'm sure no one was ready to turn back. We were on the way to America on a neutral country's ship and moral kids like us knew that every country observed rules of law even during wars. It was the Spring of 1942; I, and my peers, had not yet learned that in Auschwitz, our enemies had already been gassing and cremating masses of Jews since September 3, 1941. Bear in mind that though the adults in Rivesaltes may have learned of the ongoing massacres of thousands of Jews in Eastern Europe which, as I said before, unbeknownst to me, may have had much to do with my mother's decision that I should escape Rivesaltes, I doubt that any of us kids knew of these breaches of war laws. So much for observing the rules of law even in war! In any case, we were on our way. I don't remember pulling out of Casablanca port. I do remember noting that the *Serpa Pinta* was a substantially smaller vessel than *Le Marechal Liautey*. But in some ways I liked the *Serpa Pinta* better, it

seemed a nicer vessel. I may be mistaken but it seemed not made of cream-color-painted-metal everything, walls, doors; *Serpa Pinta* seemed to have more wood materials, frames, doors, even some handsome dark brown polished banisters in places.

But soon again, within hours of setting off, the rolling of the ship grabbed my vulnerable gut, just recently settled from its first trials. You don't have to be an astute physicist to know that the rolling of ships on the Atlantic would be of wider range than that produced by the comparatively quieter Mediterranean. I got sick, sick. Now here was true injustice on the part of Mother Nature! There was food on the *Serpa Pinta*. I had no idea there was this much food anywhere in those days. How could the Portuguese have food in such abundance when the rest of Europe, at least the Europe I knew, was near starvation? For us it's as if food had nearly died; certainly good food had. It looked like there were tons of it on this ship, including marvelous-looking white bread. "Marvelous-looking" because I had not seen such voluptuous bread since Bruxelles; of course in Bruxelles I didn't realize that I might some day think of bread as voluptuous, beautiful, whatever gorgeous word you want to use. Except for very early there, even in Village the bread didn't look so good. Now true, my indignation against Mother Nature was not strong; I may feel that a bit more today than I did then. With a mix of today-feeling and then-feeling, what a sardonic plan by some nasty power: here was this gorgeous bread and in such abundance, as well as other eating things including meat and I was so sea sick, I couldn't take one bite for at least 3 days! Talk of torture. Here I was, 13, having starved since we left Bruxelles—except for my meal in the train station at Narbonne, not that one meal relieves near-starvation—for two years, this luscious looking food at my disposal and I could not eat a morsel.

Maybe, in all fairness to her, I should make mention of the fact that Mother Nature had the decency and compassion to let us have good weather. We had a fairly calm Atlantic to roll through. Fortunately, after two days of violent seasickness, a third one more moderate, my physiology accommodated to the rhythmic ups and downs of the ocean and my seasickness abated. My appetite came back little by little, counterpoint to my abating gut disturbance. The food was good. Since I could only gradually eat an expectable amount, I did not suffer from too rapid a gorging of myself—not that I saw any of my peers suffer that disorder. By the way I was not the only one frequently running to, spending some time in, and puking into latrine receptacles, or when the sickness calmed, leaning, hyper-extending over the deck ship rail. For that of course you had to know where to go to not afflict others or yourself for that matter with whatever it was you were able to project back to where it all came from, like earth to earth, dust to dust.

I don't know how or when exactly, but in the midst of this quite tolerable misery—I'll take seasickness any day over the misery we had just left behind—, a lovely Spanish girl about my age, Manolita, asked me with a smile if I needed any clothes washed; she was going to wash her clothes. I don't know if she had noticed my frequently vomiting over the rail and not wrongly assumed that some of it might have undesirably come back to me, compliments of the moderate ocean wind. Or whether she was quite simply a smart kid who knew by now, everyone needed some underwear and shirts washed. Both easily applied to me. It was a truly lovely offer. I accepted it, I think, nicely. I had never talked to her before, nor she to me. Of course, this made Manolita and me friends, and we were friendly for the duration of our voyage. Looking back, I suppose she may have liked me more than just to be friends; I liked her too, but I

was not influenced by feelings other than feeling friendly toward her. I don't mean that I was wise or unwise. From the little I knew of her, Manolita was a very nice girl, and she gave me a very nice moment; I remember it with warmth. None of us was rich in nice moments in that era; or more accurately, we were all wanting of so much that all the nice moments we could get then would be remembered with warmth. Also, I want to note here, I may have done so before, that among the 50 refugees, we were not just Jews; some of the kids, kids who no doubt had suffered a great deal too, were Spanish refugees, perhaps orphans, victims of the Spanish dictator Franco. I can't remember, that too with some regret, where she went after we arrived in America. Maybe her gesture accelerated my gradual conquest over my seasickness.

From about the 3rd day on the *Serpa Pinta* things improved, by the 4th day they had improved well. In good time too, because, some interesting things happened. At least they would be very interesting for a 13 year-old in that era, or in any era. I learned a few interesting things about sex on the ship. The first of these was a negatively interesting thing; the second was nearly-priceless. I had begun to eat well, much to my surprise, an experience shared by my peers—no one had told us there would be this kind of food on the ship. I guess that our shepherds did not know either or no doubt, they would have told us, if only to make our trip easier. Not only did I feel like eating and did, but I was also ready to take a bath, since we had learned that such facilities existed on the ship. My hygiene-impulse had yielded to my seasickness nearly as much as had my appetite; like my appetite, my wish to be clean came back too. For reasons that are a mystery to me, the powers that be made us go the bathe in pairs, not sex-mixed pairs obviously. During our trip I had befriended a boy a bit older than I, 14; I can't remember his name. He had an older brother, 16; he was the oldest among us.

Though the younger of the brothers was my “friend”, I chummed around a bit with the 16 year-old too. When I indicated that I was going to bathe, the older one asked if we could go together. Why he did not ask his brother to do so, I have no idea. Or, I had no idea then. So off to bathe we went. Things were going perfectly fine, we got there, started the water going, undressed and I got in the tub. I’m not certain that there was only one tub or whether there were two tubs. In any case, in the course of our talking about who knows what, he asked if I’d let him put his penis in my anus. Wow, wait a minute, I thought, where did that come from. Within a moment I told him that I did not want that; no I was not interested. Fortunately, he did not press his point. Not that he would have succeeded because even though I was always a small guy, and I did feel some fear when it came to fists, I did not back off the few times I was challenged. Boys in Europe are not different than American boys when it comes to showing their prowess or defending their honor by accepting to get into a wrestling-boxing—no kicking was allowed among young guys fighting in those days—match with another, especially if he was bigger than you. Machismo to a degree is universal among males, though more so in some cultures than others. I was not afraid of bigger kids because once challenged years before, in Bruxelles, I had accepted the challenge of a bigger kid, had given him a good pounding with a nose bleed that scared him, and had handled that well. In fact, since then I had gained the reputation among my Bruxellois friends as one who could take on a big kid. In any case, I finished my bath as did he in pretty good spirits with nothing untoward happening. Some years later, reflecting on this event, I did curse the son-of-bitch, but did not get too heated about it since I had simply and competently put him off. He was horny I guess. Yet, he did have opportunities as I soon found out, that I would have thought would serve him much better than I. Who knows.

Interestingly, he is the one who set up the second opportunity that presented itself for me to learn more about sex. With this one, I would graduate from the lesson my favorite cousin David David, yes, twice David, first and last name, had given me years before, when I was about 9, about masturbation. He showed me how you do it, and tried to convince me that it felt good, as if I didn't register that fact myself. But this time the lesson was much more memorable and truly elevated my sexual experiencing. Somehow, there we were one late afternoon, on deck with Annette, interesting that I remember her name, my 14 year-old friend, his sixteen year-old brother and I. The 16 year-old took the responsibility if I can speak of it that way, of bringing Annette around to his sexual interest in her. In had never been in that position before: a rather passive participant, but nonetheless a participant, in the seduction of a 13 year-old girl.

Annette was a girl just as traumatized as the rest of us, and maybe more. I really did not know her, and I am not sure that my co-conspirators, including the active, perhaps I should say the aggressive agent in this event, knew her either. It does seem to me that the older brother may have some encounter with Annette before; this was not a first time effort at seduction, for all I know it may not be the first time that this not so pleasant character seduced her. It was as if he was revisiting a known situation. He too easily seduced her into all 4 of us playing together. I didn't know then what I know now. And this is not the way I would have written my script about getting to know what I learned then. I did not have these thoughts then; this is what I think now. Truthfully, I don't think I knew what this 16 year-old horny guy was getting at. I was a passive though very interested participant. On my own I would not have known to go the distance he went. I had a girlfriend in *La Villa*, Sara, I think, was her name. She was a lovely girl. I really felt very warmly toward her; I really liked her; too early to

say that I loved her. But we did not progress in our romantic interaction beyond kissing. To this day, even though her picture is quite vague, I have warm memories of her. Anyway, coming back to Annette on the *Serpa Pinta*, our 16 year-old guide was on a quest to claim something he either had known before or had been striving to get to before. The next thing I knew he succeeded in getting Annette to allow us to engage with her sexually. When I, following the example and guidance of my senior peer-instructor who I felt was a bit of a scoundrel, touched her genitals and entered my finger into her vagina, I had never, never touched anything as gut-stirring, well genitals-plus-stirring, as that; it was . . . awesome, the best word I come up with. I will not describe it; I'm not sure I could. It was to my 13-year-old mind, well, maybe not just my 13-year-old mind, absolutely the most positively shivering sensation I had yet experienced. To me today, I know it was one of those meaningful moments in life that you record just to remember over and over, especially in a time of need, in a time when you want to remind yourself, that you've got a lot to live for.

What followed in actuality was not as gripping. In our play-exploration of her, specifically of her private parts, which I must say she did respond to, though, no doubt anxiety played its damned unpleasant role, she increasingly yielded to the advances of our senior member. She yielded to his pressures and let him penetrate her with his hard-up erect organ. Of course there were two more of us, I being the youngest of the three. After our 16 year-old hungry member satisfied himself—no doubt only for several hours, I would guess—quickly enough, lest Annette find she could not go on with this activity, stood up and proceeded to try to relieve himself of a large load of sexual excitement-frustration he's been walking around with for who knows how long. After what seemed to me an interminable time, he achieved his ends, and yielded. It

was my turn. What do I do? I let my biology take over. By the way, for reasons I can't explain, there are a lot of things I can't explain, we were doing all of this illicit but normal adolescent stuff standing up. Well, come to think of it, it was not the last time I did it standing up. But that's another story, as they say. So it was my turn and I rose to the occasion. With as much awe as when I first touched Annette, I entered my penis into her incredible body-part. I don't know which felt more mind-stirring, to touch her with my finger that first time or with my penis. No need to dwell on this question. Anyway, I did what comes naturally. But this, I, being number 3, a number I don't particularly strive for, Annette, who to me, long before I became a shrink, seemed to be quite worried about what she had allowed herself to be talked into by my scoundrel cohort, suddenly felt she could no longer go on with this enterprise of getting whatever it was she sought in letting herself be taken advantage of this way—thoughts I did not have then as a growing sex-hungry 13 year-old. Midway in my first lesson about sexual intercourse, Annette had reached all she could tolerate of this trying to please boys stuff, or whatever it was that led her into this; she feebly let me know she did not want to go on. Much to my dismay, since I had not reached my biological or psychological end point on this matter, Annette said and acted like she was getting frightened and, being a gentleman—mh, had I really been on that occasion?—I would not press my point and complied with her obvious wish to terminate this project now. I was most appreciative of what Annette had allowed me to experience and did not want to cause her pain. I like to think that I was not a scoundrel like our 16-year-old anti-hero. Hoping that this event did not cause Annette as much trouble as I have later feared it may, I do remember it as a gift, at a time when gifts were very sparse. Whatever happened to Annette, I remember her very fondly.

During the last days of our Atlantic crossing the ocean was fairly calm, all seemed quite non-threatening, even though the possibility of German U-boats was still occasionally mentioned. We saw none. Nor did we see any vessel in trouble as we went. Our last day on ship, the morning was somewhat foggy. Once someone sighted land, the word got around quickly, excitement burst out and many people gathered at the bow of the ship, trying as best each could to find a place along the rail to see as much as one could. Once at the rail, the excitement heaved and then lessened to a hum that stayed and did not die down from that moment. Many of us, including Savic and I, just stayed at the rail, excited but also somewhat mesmerized by the approaching land of promise. It took a while; the ship just seemed to take its time. Well, our impatience to get there leaked out; the ship was doing its best. Faces, especially the grown-ups' faces, were beaming. I felt a quieter excitement; maybe some of the other kids did too. Yes, it was good to get to America; but the conditions, coming to America without my mother, dampened the enormity of excitement this type of arrival warrants, coming to America. And then a new quite more vibrant excitement burst out with the cry "*La Statue d'Liberte!*" Some just have better vision than I, or maybe they are far-sighted. I started to search for the Statue where arms with outstretched index finger were pointing, and I saw it. It was a sobering moment; a different calming of the excitement, the humming around much less than before, I think a feeling of awe took over as I, and no doubt the others too, looked at it, still far off and quite small. It turned into a peaceful calm, I felt that the ocean seemed to calm some too; the land became more and more visible, the city became visible. Then as we entered the harbor, the Statue of Liberty increasingly grew and I was struck by its enormity; it was, awesome. I was a kid, 13,

but somehow, perhaps because of the things I had heard said about America in years before, it was sobering, exciting, awesome to be nearing our landing in America.

Arriving in America

I was well again, no more seasickness, I could marvel at the enormity of the Statue of Liberty and soon after, marvel at the *Serpa Pinta* slowly getting into its berth, I assume, at one of Ellis Island's docks. As the ship was nearly into its temporary resting place, even though it was not a large ship, it seemed to stir much activity on the dock. Looking back, I can imagine, not only was a ship coming in, but it carried people from Europe, people getting out of the that place "over there"—which always makes me think of Caruso singing it,

"Over there, over there,
Send the word, send the word over there,
That the Yanks are coming, the Yanks are coming,
The Yanks are coming over there . . ."—

where America again, was now at war. Perhaps some of the people milling on the dock knew that the ship would soon unload 50 refugee children, now in America without their families. Maybe this happened these days when any ship came into America, now bringing home natives who had been abroad and newcomers.

I know we must have come through Ellis Island; in that era that was the front door into America, the land where you could get rich so you would never starve again. It did not look like the land of getting rich on Ellis Island. We walked down the plank onto the dock, and I felt again, even though I no longer was seasick, the remarkable security standing on land that stays put brings, land that does not go up and down, again

and again, constantly. In fact, I remember feeling unsteady as I walked a few steps on the dock, having now to steady that mechanism in my brain that deals with equilibrium. It did not take long for me to accommodate to stability. We walked into what looked like a hangar, big, high ceiling, partitions guiding us through some maze, as if we had to be tested before we could get onto America's soil. We were herded into an area a bit apart from the others, and in fact we were tested, not unreasonably I must say as a physician, since those responsible needed to and indeed should have checked us out for some dread contagious disease that could contaminate New York, and more. We were all skinny, we were all somewhat sickly looking but none of us had a dread disease. Besides, even though we might have looked tired and dragged out, we were a pretty positive sounding, maybe even positive looking bunch, I sure know I felt like that. We got out fine, Savic and I seeming to have agreed to stay close; no one was held back.

When we crossed the waters that surrounded Ellis Island to whichever of the New York Boroughs we went, even though we did not land in Manhattan, I gradually came to see, again with awe, the large expanse and the large buildings that were New York. It is not that there are no large buildings in Bruxelles, there are, like for example, *Le Palais de Justice* (The Palace of Justice—The Court House). It's big. But so large an expanse of land crowded with masses of large buildings, some very tall, that was awe-inspiring. Bruxelles is not a small town; but even before I was 10 I could walk, and did, from *La Gare du Midi* (South Station) to *La Gare du Nord* (North Station), and a while later walk back to where I came from without collapsing. I could not do that in the expanse I saw that was New York. We landed in one of the Boroughs, the Bronx or Brooklyn. At some point we were on a bus to our temporary destination. Another one of the indelible moments was when the bus stopped at our destination. The window

right next to my seat was open and I saw two kids, I guessed around 5 years of age, playing and obviously talking-shouting to each other in sounds I did not understand at all. The thought came to me in just a moment: how could these little kids understand and speak English when I could barely understand more than two words? Of course, as soon as I formulated the thought I knew the answer. But I distinctly remember my amazement at the fact that they knew English and they were just little kids, and I, older and bigger than they, for all intents and purposes could not understand a word. The lessons we learn!

Off the bus, we went into yet another very temporary asylum where we stayed for perhaps five days. Again dormitory accommodations, high-ceilinged dining hall, long tables with lots of kids. Savic and I were sticking together. I remember especially my introduction to American cereal. We did not have that type of breakfast food in Bruxelles and of course we did not have such during our starvation sojourn in France. In New York, they served this funny stuff that actually tasted quite good. I had not yet reached the point of being certain that now I would not be starving anymore, so anything other than rutabagas or turnips tasted good. But this flaky stuff they gave us actually tasted good. We were eating away, and one of the nice social-work, Red Cross type women leaned toward my bowl of cereal and said, “We put milk in it; it’s good with milk in it.” Her gesticulations and pointing to milk and my bowl helped me understand what she was saying. I shook my head thinking, “Oh no, I can’t imagine putting milk on such good-tasting cereal.” The idea sounded very strange to me. That was my first encounter with American Corn Flakes. Actually soon thereafter, following Savic’s more adventurous example, I did let myself be convinced that it was OK to try that good stuff with milk on it; it was OK.

Within days of our arrival in New York we were told that we would all be going somewhere in America; we were not just staying where we now were. I can't recall if we had been told on the way over that we would be distributed to families willing to receive a refugee child from Europe, for all intents and purposes, a war-orphan, or we were told of this in New York. Wherever we were told, Savic and I decided we would stay together. In fact, that decision was quite binding. First of all we decided we wanted to be placed in the same city. We may even have said that we wanted to stay together, not just in the same city. This is one of the explanations that would account for the fact that we were placed with the same family. Savic and I had known one another for over one-and-a-half years. Even though there had been an interval of nearly one-year when we did not see each other, having shared the state of our world as we did bound us together in a special way. Being 11-12 years old, together in the same hell-hole, pretending we were "all for one, and one for all" heroic musketeers, in efforts to make lighter that grim cloud around us and make easier the hunger we shared, we felt a bond that made us want to stay together. One can make friends like that in adverse life conditions. Looking back now I also think that we were each, again, on the point of being separated from those familiar to us. When we left our families, our parents in Marseilles, we all share a common major life event. It's like people who go through a life-threatening fire together, or a nearly disastrous plane crash together; it binds. But there was even more for us. We were essentially orphans, even if only transiently. Each of us was alone, and for most normal enough kids, it is quite natural, self-preservative actually, to find someone to bond with. And Savic and I did just that. We asked to stay together, that is to go to the same city; we did not expect that we could stay in the same family. But we did.

CHAPTER 6

THE START OF MY NEW LIFE

Pittsburgh, America

Savic and I were placed with the same family, the Wagner family. Good heavens, what generosity! It did not register with me when I was a 13 year-old, I was not aware then, as I have been now for a long time, how enormously generous, how deeply decent, Faye and Harry Wagner were; and how lovely and accepting their 3 young daughters were, Phyllis, then about 8, Sandy, about 5, and Evie, about 2, were and ever since stayed, in accepting two 13 year-old strangers into their home. Yes, we were Jewish refugees and quite a number of families throughout America opened their homes to us. Harry and Faye Wagner were not well-to-do people. At the time Harry supported his family of five by driving a bread truck route for one of the well-known Pittsburgh bakeries. Faye was a stay-at-home Mom, very common in those days. The house was modest; there were enough bedrooms to accommodate Faye and Harry in one, of course, the three girls in another, and there remained a very small bedroom that Savic and I shared. The Wagner family treated us really well. I had some run-ins with Harry, who wanted a boy who would admire and live up to his hopes; I was not that kid. He liked my making good grades, but he did not approve of my interest in music; and I guess most of all, my need then to be an adolescent who had come to be quite self-reliant for his age and wanted to have a good deal of self-determination bounced unpleasantly off the program he somehow envisioned for me. I'm not altogether sure what that program was; but whatever it was, it was not where I was going. Our run-ins

were occasional and never got harsh; they just could be quite unpleasant. But these did not and certainly do not interfere with my enormous gratitude and love for him.

Faye was a remarkable woman. I loved her from the start and my feelings for her continued, and continue even now; she died some years ago. My dilemma with her was that emotionally I could not call her “Mrs. Wagner”, that was too removed from how I felt about her; I could not call her “Mom”, that was just out of the question for me, I had a mother, and Faye Wagner in no way suggested that I do. How I came to it I don’t know but I came to call her “Lady”. Now, it was not “Lady” in a distancing, or depreciating, or in any way negative; I said it with warmth, and I felt she knew it. She was, truly, a Lady. She never gave me any indication that she did not like being called “Lady”; nor did Harry say anything about it; he would have, if he had not liked it. Nor did the kids say anything or seem to object. Maybe it was plain obvious that I really liked and respected her, and that I was very appreciative for all she was doing to make our coming to this foreign land work for us and help us get started in America. Who wouldn’t be appreciative, when given the circumstances of their life, they took in two 13 year-old refugees from Europe! Incredible. Faye and Harry made it possible for Savic and me to pick up living our life the way it was before the war.

But no it wasn’t that. Before the war I was in a world with my mother, my uncles, aunts, cousins, friends, my school, Bruxelles, speaking French and Yiddish. Of course this, as of May 1942, was not my life before the war. It was my life taking a very different turn than I had ever imagined. It was the start of my very different life. I didn’t know then that it really was the start of a new life; my old life had been abruptly stopped, mangled, and it is taking me the rest of this life in America to bring some closure to what happened to my life of origin. It was not until a decade after I came to

America that I knew my original life was over. That it was lost. But as it did even in Riversaltes, life went on; and from the mangling, with the help of many on the way, it evolved into this very different, new and eventually very good life.

Two years after the war started, I was again in a safe land. I had been transplanted from Europe to America, with very little said and my not realizing that I was to make a new life in America. Mora was the one who, I remember, spoke to me of my life in America 20 years later. When I saw my mother in Marseilles she had either been totally vague about our future and it may be, as I think of it now, that I don't really remember what we said during our visit in Marseilles. Looking back, our future was shrouded in such uncertainty, that whatever my mother said to me, could only have been supposition. Would I have wanted to hear such uncertainty at 13? Or any other time? I never doubted that I would see my mother again. Then, it was not a question of would I see the rest of my family again. It never occurred to me to think that my life in Bruxelles was over. Yet somehow, I did feel that it was totally up to me and those around me to keep my life going. If even in Rivesaltes life went on; it would go on now too. Of course Savic and I couldn't make it work just by ourselves. We were without parents, we couldn't speak the language, and we were penniless. But, we were not alone. We were with the Wagners and we very soon found out that the Jewish Social Services of Pittsburgh, like there are such Bureaus in every large-enough city in America, had taken on the responsibility for us, those 50 kids who had come over on the *Marechal Liautey* and *Serpa Pinta* connection. We later also found out that the American Quakers, and the name of Eleanor Roosevelt surfaced many times when those around us talked about it, also had a hand in our coming away from the increasingly more malignant conditions perpetrated by humans against humans in Europe. We had

been rescued from the “Final Solution” which started in Wannsee about 4 months before, on January 20, 1942, and began to make itself felt in France in April 1942. Nearly at the same time as the first convoy of foreign Jews were shipped from Drancy, outside of Paris, destination Auschwitz, Savic and I, and 48 other Jewish and Spanish children had been shipped to America.

This thought stuns me to this day.

Entry into Our “New World”

Savic and I entered this “new world” without inordinate difficulties. Neither of us knew what would happen next in terms of our families and the life we had left behind. My guess is that the prime persons responsible for us were on the one hand Harry and Faye Wagner and, on the other hand, the Jewish Social Services Bureau, Director, Mrs. Gertrude Glick, and my assigned Case Worker, Mrs. Rhoda Mintzer. The Wagners saw to it that we were well fed, always with them, like one family; that we got to bed at a reasonable time, maintained hygiene practices both as we had known them in good times before the war and as they maintained themselves. When the time came for it, they saw to it that we got up in time for school, would be fed at lunch time, that we socialized as kids might be expected to, all in all that we led a pretty normal kids’ life in Pittsburgh. The Jewish Social Services, Mrs. Mintzer, who was mostly visible to me at the beginning of our life in Pittsburgh were no doubt the ones responsible for our developmental program, such as how to proceed with our education—which I assume they took on until we finished High School—and providing the Wagners some funds to clothes and feed us—which no doubt hardly met the expenses required to take care of our needs. I for one, also held them responsible to

provide us with any news of my mother and Savic's parents. They also took responsibility for our citizenry in America including their taking action when the time came for our Naturalization in June 1952, and the handling of all documents pertaining to our actually being on Earth, formerly in Belgium and France, and now in America. They probably did other things as well of which I have never been aware. Though Mrs. Rhoda Mintzer was assigned to our case, our direct contact with her was quite infrequent. Interestingly, I also remember the address of the Bureau: 15 Fernando Street, (in the Hill District) in Pittsburgh. Am I destined to remember Social Services Bureau addresses? I know the one in Marseilles (of the OSE) was on Rue d'Italie, near the train station. All well and good, but how do you get some foreign kids with no families of their own to start life in America? The first most basic steps had been taken. We had a foster home where we would stay for an undetermined period of time; and our papers were in order. We also soon had a Pediatrician and in time got a dentist. The next most expectable important thing was getting us started in school.

Great! But what do you do when you have kids approaching the High School years who can't speak English? While we might have been ready age-wise for entry into High School four months after we landed in America, there would have been no assurance that we could learn what we needed to learn to progress fruitfully in an American school speaking and understanding only French and Yiddish! So we were sent to school for one year to learn English and basics in a number of course in preparation of an American High School education. It is also a fact that during the two years from May 1940 to the present May 1942, the schooling I got was inconstant; I got a scatter of classes for three or so fall months in 1940 while in Ricibidou, and 7 to 8 months of regular school, probably 7th grade during the academic year 1941-1942 in

St.Raphael. So during our first year in America, we were in a special class where in the very capable brown-spotted hands of Miss Prosser, we learned English, how to speak, read and write it, we learned some American History, including especially Citizenship—the Pledge of Allegiance, the Bill of Rights, Lincoln’s magnificent “. . . We hold these truths to be self-evident . . .”—and some math. With this year of preparation, all evidence points to the fact that Savic and I were well prepared by Miss Prosser, as we proceeded from there to Taylor Allderdice High School in Pittsburgh where we both progressed quite successfully. And we continued to progress quite successfully academically and both ended up a decade and one half later as physicians.

While Savic and I had determined we would stay together when we came to America, within less than one year our relationship suffered a number of disagreements that progressively made our sharing the same small bedroom difficult. Why this occurred between us is somewhat puzzling because each of us got along quite well with others around us. My relationships with the Wagner family and from all I saw his relationships with them were good. So were our relationships with our neighborhood and Shul peers whom we shared. It is true that the bedroom we shared was exceedingly small and really did not accommodate two 13-14 year-olds well. Neither of us was happy with this turn of events, but being together became not only unpleasant to the two of us but to our host family as well. Those responsible for us thought it might be to our advantage to be separated, for one of us to be placed in another home. I cannot reconstruct how it was decided, but it was; Savic went into another home; I stayed with the Wagners. It could just as easily been the other way; other than the ill-feeling Savic and I experienced at being separated, no ill-feelings seemed to have been experienced by any of us. Savic settled into the other home quite nicely, from all I learned about it

from him. But even to this day, I puzzle over what happened to us then; why was it that once we found asylum in America and were well on the way to making a good start in our new life, in our new world, my very special friend Savic and I could not get along?

I have no answer to this question, but I do have some thoughts. We were good friends and have valued each other to this day, even though we have not maintained active contact. Were we to meet today, it would be a warm and most welcome event for each of us. I wonder if we found interest in each other as 11-12 year-olds stuck in the same coerced misery, liked one another on meeting, finding harmony when we played together pretending we were good-guy musketeers fighting evil, two Jewish boys fighting Nazis. We were going to escape from Rivesaltes together; once our parents told us they wanted us to do so, we felt even more drawn to one another. We must have been friends then already or why would my mother and Savic's parents have even considered that we would escape together? But as I said before, at the last minute, Savic's parents retreated from the plan, and my mother and I agreed that I would follow through on the plans. I escaped; Savic stayed in Rivesaltes. The one year later, under very challenging, frightening conditions, going to America alone, without one's parents, we find each other again! What a remarkable moment. One year later, after having planned to escape together, one of us escaping and the other staying put in first circles of hell, we find ourselves reunited. I was blown over by it; all signs indicated that Savic was too. It may have been at that moment that we agreed, not yet saying it, that we would come to America together, and this time, we would go to the end of the line of this voyage together. Had we without thinking it decide to cling together like two *naufraagees* (shipwreck survivors), clinging together in a very uncertain sea? Now that our life was getting restarted, that we each were making a good start, maybe we could

let go and not cling to each other, at least not be needing to be in the same family; maybe the same city was enough.

But couldn't we, not cling to each other and still stay in the same family? After all siblings don't cling together and stay in the same family. Maybe something made us need to be separated, to not see each night and day. Had we become too painful reminders to one another, were we simply too constant reminders of who we really were, two kids who had left their families and all that went with them, behind? Did we, as we were straining to cope with the many challenges we were facing, did we now miss our families and life as we had known it before this whole mess started, unbearably? We were constant reminders to one another: "*Heh, Savic, comment vas ta mere? Et ton pere? Et Michel?*" "*Et toi, Henri, comment vas ta mere?* (Heh, Savic, how's your mother? And your father? And Michel [Savic's younger brother]. Heh, Henri, how's your mother?) Just one look was enough. How could we deal with that? We had to go on with today, and wait for time to bring our better past and better present together. We were too young to handle this without strife. Maybe grown-ups would've found it unbearable too. With deeply felt sadness I say today, we couldn't do it. We separated; life went on.

I am certain that it was Harry and Faye who thought of it, not the Social Service Bureau. They enrolled me for Hebrew School class, quite with my consent, in a very small Synagogue two blocks from 1119 Greenfield Avenue, Squirrel Hill, where we lived. I remember the face of the young schoolmaster, but not his name—it could have been Rabbi Kimel, but I am not certain. It was totally in my preprogrammed brain that I would have a Bar Mitzvah. In fact, with my background, my mother and my uncle Franken would have raised all kinds of hell, if I did not have my Bar Mitzvah. All

concerned seemed quite indifferent to the fact that I was not to be 13, but 14. So, one year here, one year there, what's the big deal? Besides these were special times with kids coming to Pittsburgh and other places in America from "over there." Yes, I had my Bar Mitzvah at 14, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, U.S.A., in a small Shul I believe on Murray Avenue, with some very nice people wishing me well. It was nice, and very generous of Faye and Harry, and "the girls", Phyllis, Sandy, and Evelyn.

From there, I took off, so did Savic. We did well, were both very good students. We had no news from our parents. But we both knew we would, someday, maybe when the war "over there" was over. Savic and I, living in separate communities now, saw one another from time to time. I guess as often as brothers might later in life, after they had left home. The homes, school, friends, summer camps, all were the American way; they were good. We grew in them well. It was the summer of 1945 when the war with "The Axis", Germany, Italy, and Japan, was finally over. We heard nothing from "over there". For me, and no doubt for Savic, this now was getting worrisome. It was long enough already! Now the war was over; the more time passed and I heard nothing, and the Social Service Bureau heard nothing, the more my dread grew about my mother's whereabouts and fate. I went on living; I had no choice. So everyday, I went on living.

I can't remember when—there is too much I can't remember, and that's one of my miseries—but it sometime in our later High School years, that Savic me that he had heard from his mother. It was almost unbelievable; Savic had heard from his mother. His father had died, I believe in Rivesaltes—where many died of starvation and disease. His brother Michel was with his mother. But the news for me was not good. Savic's mother told him that my mother had been sent away from Rivesaltes to one of the death

camp, and Savic's mother was certain that she had been murdered. Along with so many other Jews.

Multiplying my blessings, Donald Steinfirst and his family came into my life, or Donald took me into their life. I cannot recall just how I came to meet Donald. I think I met Donald when, while in 10th or 11th grade in High School. My High School music teacher, Emma Steiner, the choir director, who I will never forget, never, thought that I had a good voice and should have singing lessons. Emma Steiner, she deserves to rest in peace, was an unmarried woman, in her 50s I would guess, who just was totally dedicated to making music, by means of the choir, in Alderdice High School. Emma Steiner was marvelous, and quite a character. If something got into her, if we ticked her off in one way or another, not an uncommon occurrence with this very demanding Choir Directrice, we were in for a lecture, and sometimes in extremis to her, we would get a harangue. She would then take off on her imaginary horse, and tell us, scolding, she didn't know why in the world she was subjecting herself to the torture of trying to get brats like us to make music. Why, she'd marry the first Nigger who asked her, she'd occasionally say! A very regrettable expression! It was her maladroitness at telling us she would do anything just to not have to slave with us brats. She was a "White American Anglosaxon Protestant", a "WASP", as is said. It may be that she was biased; though other than for that unfortunate racial slur, I never saw or heard any other evidence of it in her. Bear in mind that this was perhaps 1947, 1948, a time when such prejudicial slurs by a teacher in a classroom did not encounter the criticism it would deservedly get today, and should have gotten then. However, as she could be difficult, and even brash at moments, she was also devoted and committed to having the best High School choir in Pittsburgh. And she did engage with us personally, some of

us more than others. I liked Emma Steiner; I did not like her tirades, but she was a top notch musician, and she did manage, year after year, by driving us fairly hard, to have one of the best city choirs. It was my good fortune that Emma Steiner liked me. She thought I had a good voice; that it ought to be trained outside of school. Because I let her know that I had not monetary resources for voice lessons, she thought that Donald Steinfirst, the music critic of the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, might be able to help me find some funding somewhere. Thus I met Donald Steinfirst.

We immediately like each other. Though Donald was a Vice-President of a substantial roofing materials production company, his true love was music. With no formal training he educated himself into becoming a highly well-regarded music critic. I suspect that the part of Music Criticism he liked best was not all the free concerts and operas he got to go to, nor writing the reviews, nor tapping them on an ancient typewriter at the Newspaper, no; it was entertainint some of the big stars in his home. There I met, among others, Vladimir Horowitz, and my favorite of them, Jan Peerce. Donald just beamed from start to finish at those soirees. So did Jane, his wife. Donald got me some funds for voice lessons. But he and Jane also opened their home to me. When I was in 11th grade, I became a rather frequent visitors to their house. Donald, Jane, Dick their oldest son, and Susan and John, the twins, were all very welcoming to me. This was just the beginning of my relationship with the family. Donald enormously facilitated my growing from adolescence into adulthood. Once I decided that I wanted to become a professional musician, a singer, Donald was instrumental in my auditioning for Vladimir Bakaleinikoff, then Assistant Conductor of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, and then with Fritz Dorian, Senior Musicologist at then Carnegie-Tech's College of Fine Arts, Music Department. A very substantial scholarship made it

possible for me to get a degree in Music. Between the remarkably generous, loving, devoted Wagner family and the warm, enriching, helpful Steinfirst family, the path from my arrival to Pittsburgh, learning English and about America, going through High School and the first stage of my College education was immeasurably facilitated. Nothing can wipe away the loss of my life with my family in Bruxelles. But what the Wagner and the Steinfirst families gave to me has been good for a lifetime and more.

CHAPTER 7

LOOKING BACK – 60 YEARS LATER

Looking back on times like these, on events like these, is not easy. I have been looking back for many years since the day I came to America. It is now 60 years later. As we all do, my looking back attaches to events that have gotten anchored to dates, some dates spanning an era, some vague, some marked to the day and very clear. Those marked to the day stand out. Two dates stand out for me in highest relief, May 1, 1941 and August 14, 1942.

On May 1, 1941, at 12, I Escaped from Rivesaltes

According Marrus and Paxton, Rivesaltes was one of the nastiest of Vichy-France's thirty-one Concentration Camps. Looking back at my escape, I find it easy and difficult to answer, "How did I do that?" My friends Judith Kestenberg and Ira Brenner who studied and wrote about child survivors¹, found that many children, especially teenagers, reacted to the life situations that we dished out to them with surprising energy, ingenuity, and effectiveness that reached well beyond what might have been anticipated. Teenagers, according to my friends, were found to have done things that in normal every day life would not have been expected of them at all, and they succeeded. Some even tolerated the stresses and strains of concentration camp, and other, experiences with better capability than many adults. I know what they mean.

It was no big deal for me to escape from Rivesaltes. My mother told me she wanted me to do it. OK, I'd do it. I love her; I trusted her; I looked up to her. No, she

wasn't perfect. That's not what she was. She was real, she was loving, and I knew that she meant what's best for me. It's not really complicated. Many a boy my age, in these conditions, would have done the same. It was life, then. One thought survival. It is striking to me even today how we could go from playing *Les Trois Mousquetaires* (The Three Musketeers) to shift into the "This is your life, your families' life; this is no game; survive!" But that exactly is the resilience of kids, kids of an age that could tolerate separation from family and take up life-threatening challenges—adolescents, pre-adults. I did it. It did not save my mother—which brings my tears. It did save me. The OSE (*Oeuvre de Secours aux Enfants*—Works [Efforts] to Rescue Children) was right. Reading Vivette Samuel's *Sauver Les Enfants* (Save the Children), I learned that the OSE knew, assumed, that if children stayed with their parents, when the parents were sent to the extermination camps, the children would be sent with them. Reading that the OSE separated children from their parents with this in mind shocked me. What is this, Solomon deciding who gets the child? The OSE people were not wrong. It's just difficult to think that these devoted and committed adults knowingly separated the children from their parents to save the children. Many Jews predicted what the Nazis from Germany might do, *Mein Kampf* (My Battle) made it very clear; we just didn't know what method Hitler and his henchmen would devise. What we did not know is that the French Nazis could match them step for step, and at times be a step ahead.

I was saved. My mother died in Auschwitz, as probably did my father and my brother, along with who knows how many of my childhood family.

August 14, 1942

My mother was sent to Auschwitz on August 14, 1942. According to Serge Klarsfeld, this is the date on which convoy #19, carrying 991 persons, no doubt all Jews since this was part of the now activated “Final Solution”, left Drancy, destination Auschwitz, Poland. In August 1942, there were 13 convoys that carried 13,123 Jews to Auschwitz; seemingly the preferred destination for the Jews, foreign and probably French too. In 1942, the French government sent 41,951 persons from Drancy to Auschwitz. On August 14, my mother was among them. What a terrible return for my mother to her homeland. By now the wheels of the Vichy-France-German collaboration in executing the “Final Solution” were turning fairly smoothly⁵. According to Marrus and Paxton, at the outset of this collaboration, the Vichy-France plan executors managed to send their first train convoy to Drancy before the Germans were ready to receive them, causing an embarrassment for the poor Germans. But by this time, the time convoy #19 was shipped out, the dispatching to the Death Camps in Poland of Jews who had sought refuge in France seems to have proceeded without a hitch. And since the “Final Solution” called for expeditiousness, no doubt the transfer of my mother and others from Rivesaltes to Drancy to Auschwitz probably took no more than two days, three at most. It goes without saying that had I not escaped, I would have been among them. Since as Primo Levi tells us in *If This Is a Man* (retitled *Survival in Auschwitz*), it was only later in the war years, in 1944, that the killing of the incoming Jews was slowed and slave labor increased—the Germans were then getting desperate for workers and war equipment

⁵ According to the French newspaper *France Soir* of June 7, 2002, reporting on a display of the French convoying of Jews from its camps to Auschwitz, an account was

given that included the fact that “11,600 Jewish children, of whom 2,000 were less than six years old, victims of the ‘final solution’. In all, 76,000 Jews were deported from France. Only 2,500 will survive.” (materials distributed by *Les Fils et Filles des Deportees Juifs de France* [The Sons and Daughters of Jews Deported from France]; my translation from the French.)

productions—I assume that the extermination of those who arrived in Auschwitz in August 1942 was swiftly executed. In the early period of the execution of this master plan, expeditiousness was one of the high-desirability factors. No time to be wasted!

I shiver at the thought of this day of horror.

Again, at our oldest son Erik’s urging and ever-readiness to help me in the process of discovery, and recovery, I am currently in the process of finding out what I can about the fate of my father and my brother, Emanuel—whether and when they were sent to Auschwitz. Since they were in Lodz at the start of the war, they didn’t have so far to travel to reach Auschwitz. Was that good; was it bad?

To this past year, this past August 2002 to be exact, I have not been able to remember on which day my mother was sent with other internees—like cattle—from Rivesaltes to Auschwitz. Live stock is sent in wagons to be butchered, so that we can eat. Just to be gotten rid of! I just realized that I am scratching my arms and my head as I write this.

I first learned of this miserable day from Judy Kestenberg, a child psychoanalyst who studied effects of the Holocaust on survivors. I had long known Judy as a colleague and friend. Judy, herself a Holocaust survivor, much braver than I, was gathering narratives from Holocaust child survivors; she was one the key American psychiatrists-psychoanalysts doing so. I don’t recall how she came to know that I am a

child-survivor. After I had refused several invitations that I be interviewed by her, I consented. My memory, quite good for many other types of information, is absolutely dull when it comes to these matters. I probably agreed to be interviewed in the late 1980s. I could be off on this by as much as 5 years either way. In any case, Judy was just so sensitive, so sympathetic, so well distanced and close, so gentle and persistent, pressing for details and tolerant of vagueness. I came to so admire her work and her courage that I dedicated to her my address, “Influences of the Holocaust on development—One man’s experience”, which I gave in 1999 to The American College of Psychoanalysts.

Judy asked me if I wanted her to research for me what happened to my mother, my father and my brother. I had been, and to a degree still am, high-totally avoidant—when it comes to finding out what happened to them, my immediate family of origin. Well, that’s not totally accurate. In 1953, when I was 24, I made my first return visit to Europe, courtesy of the U. S. government; I was in the U. S. Army Medical Corps for the then obligatory two-year draft; I had the good fortune of being assigned to serve in Germany rather than Korea. I say the good fortune, because this assignment gave me the opportunity to be close enough to return to my hometown; in addition, of course, it also had meant that I was not going into a live war-zone. While stationed in Bamberg, Germany, on leaves from duty, I made two trips to Bruxelles. The first was in July 1953 when I searched for and found some of my family who also survived the Holocaust, and the second was in October 1953 when I found out from a most reliable source what, most likely, had happened to my mother.

In July 1953, I found dearly loved cousins who also had survived the World War II Shoah. Said aside but not lightly, I want to note here, having experienced both,

that I am among those who have found a notable distinction between European antisemitism and American antisemitism. Looking at it perhaps too simply but with gratitude, most fortunately American antisemitism is substantially more benign than the European species, especially Eastern European antisemitism, that pogrom-infected brand which, however, was notably dwarfed by that most virulent species, Nazi antisemitism. Of course, none of these species is dead, though the last is inactivated—hopefully forever.

In July 1953 I returned to Bruxelles for the first time, 11 years after we had left it. I was very eager to go; it was my first opportunity. Going as directly from Bamberg as I could, on the train to Bruxelles I felt a mix of excitement and muffled dread. I couldn't wait to get to Bruxelles, my first return to my hometown since we had left it in such a rush; and, I feared what I would and wouldn't find of my family there, of my old-life.

To this day I love Bruxelles, full of warm, loving family memories, modest existence. As a boy I, alone or with Felix, my best friend, would roam up to the old, always dirty-gray massive *Palais de Justice* (The Palace of Justice, The Court-Hhouse) where, walking uphill from where we lived on *rue de l'Economie* and *rue des Tanneurs*, through *La Place du Jeu de Balle*, a cobble-stone field where they played an odd type of ball game or that served as a large market place, and after crossing several streets including *la rue Haute*, up stone stairs to the steeply elevated *Palais d'Justice*, Felix and I, and a couple others whose names I can't remember, would run around or explore the old place like kids do. Or, from *La Place du Jeu de Balle* we could turn right toward *Le Rialto*, the movie-house we would go to on weekends to see Charlie Chaplin or Laurel and Hardy or some French-speaking American cowboy movie. Or from *La Place du*

Jeu de Balle, we could turn left and after quite a number of winding blocks come face to face with the *Meneken-Pis* single-stream fountain (the Bruxelles-famed statue of a little boy arched back exhibiting how far he can urinate), and after turning the corner enter onto *la Grand Place* (Grand Place or Square). Uniquely Bruxellois, a large cobblestoned town-square, *Grand Place* presents *L'Hotel de Ville* (City Hall), grand, gothic and very ornate, one square long, to the right on entry into the square, and surrounded then by smaller similarly ornate buildings, with shops and restaurants on street level. It is not large like Moscow's Red Square, but for Bruxelles, it's plenty large, and uniquely old-beautiful. And I cannot leave my highlights of the Bruxelles of my childhood without mentioning *Le Bois de la Cambre*, my favorite Sunday outing park south of the city at the end of *l'Avenue Louise*. We took the tram to get there, a tram that runs in very good order to this day. To go to the *Bois d'la Cambre* was a festive occasion, and holds some of my most pleasant childhood memories, though there is one that baffled me some, that time when my mother gave me a few *centimes* (pennies) to buy an ice cream cone, which I did with eagerness. But when I walked away from the ice cream stand, as I quickly righted my body that had been jarred by the uneven ground, the scoop of ice cream fell out of the cone and, I was left bereft, with an empty cone in my hand. Humiliated by the event, I did not report my sad accident to my mother.

I arrived in Bruxelles. Although I was then in the U. S. Army Medical Corps, I traveled this journey as well as my second visit, in "civilian clothes" as they say in the army. Since I speak French, in France and in Belgium I had not trouble finding my way. I did not go to a hotel to secure a bed for the night or wash up, or anything; I don't remember what I did with my traveling shoulder-strapped bag; it was not large and I probably just carried it. I had done a bit of what was necessary to freshen up on the

train and for the time being that seemed enough for me. I simply was pressed to get to my old neighborhood, a bit like going directly into the lion's den, to learn more of what was left of my family and my old community. I knew I would not find my mother; I had learned all I needed to know about that for the time being.

I had gotten off the train at *La Gare du Midi* (South Station). The station looked very different to me this time, than it had that panicky day in early May 1940 when we left Bruxelles for anywhere in France. It was a matter of just about two blocks to get from the station onto *le Boulevard du Midi* and to then reach *la rue des Tanneurs*, then a left onto and another block on *rue des Tanneurs*, then a right and within two hundred feet bearing left at the fork, I was on *rue de l'Economie*, where we lived with my Aunt Esther and cousin Joseph. I had traveled this path many times, twice daily, going to and from home to Elementary school which was on *Boulevard du Midi*. In fact, I had just passed by the school, which I remember with good memories.

We lived on the second floor, 6 *rue d'l'Economie*. It was moving, almost disturbing and yet, warming to be on this street. And it suddenly dawned on me, it struck me, that this street, and so too *la rue des Tanneurs* and the *Boulevard du Midi*, looked much smaller than I had recorded in my memory. Now, I could cross *rue d'l'Economie* in 5 or 6 bounds. We used to play marbles, tops, and all kinds of other games on this street. I was amazed at the discovery that in my child's eye, my home street was much larger than what I saw now. I thought of this many times some years later in my work with children; to the child, the world, the people in it, look much larger than they actually are; it's all dimensioned by measure against oneself. Standing in front of the house I looked up to the second floor and stood there several minutes without moving. No one saw me, not that I know of, or they might have wondered what

in the world is this man doing there? I was torn. I felt compelled to go up the stairs and look in to see the apartment we lived in; but I was very hesitant to intrude so on the people living there. What would I say, “*Excusez-moi, j’espere que je ne vous derange pas trop; je voulais simplement voir l’interieur de l’appartement. Vous voyez, j’ai vecu ici quand j’etais enfant.*” (Excuse me, I hope I am not troubling you too much; I simply wanted to see the inside of the apartment. You see, I lived here when I was a child.) That would be awkward. It was awkward as I slowly climbed the stairs, pushed from within by the pressing need to revisit the site, even if for one moment. As I approached floor level I saw that the door was open. I hesitated, but I went on, acutely embarrassed. I came to the open door, knocked and stuck my head in. There was no answer. “*Bonjour, il y a quelqu’un a la maison?*” (Hello, is someone home?) No answer. What now? I repeated my question. Still no answer. I took a step inside, very uncomfortable at what I was doing; but I looked inside. Of course the place was different, it was differently dressed, but it was the same; I recognized it well. There was warmth in it. But, quickly now I turned around, and left. I didn’t want to rush; I didn’t want to give the impression if someone were to see me that I was running away. I had done nothing ill toward anyone or property. I just needed to see the place. I encountered no one on the way out either, nor on the street. I had not been seen, I assume. Pensive, I automatically walked back to *rue des Tanneurs*, and took a right. Walking on, I was satisfied that I had seen where I had lived. The feeling of having in some way transgressed into someone’s home soon dissipated; I had disturbed no one. Turning right onto *rue des Tanneurs* was also a well traveled route for me and it was as if I automatically was going to *rue de la Querelle* (odd name, Quarrel street), where my Frenkel relatives lived, the ones we shared many a Shabbat dinner with, the uncle with

whom I had occasionally gone to Shul. Turning left onto *rue de la Querelle*, and walking looking to the right, I saw that the familiar small grocery store, a simple house really, with the ground floor being the grocery store was open and a couple people standing near the door. Without stopping I went on several doors further and looked for my Uncle's butcher shop. It was not a butcher shop anymore. Not too surprising that it was no longer his butcher shop nor anyone else's; it was a butcher shop 13 years before; now it was something else. Now I was dismayed. What happened to them? I immediately felt what I had dreaded I would experience. But wait, the grocery store, there is someone there; they might know something about the Frenkels' story or even whereabouts; they might even be the same people who were there in 1940. I walked in with a half smile, "*Bonjour, de cherche a savoir, pourriez vous me renseigner ou je pourrais trouver la famille Frenkel? Savez-vous s'il en est devenu?*" (Good day, I would like to know, can you tell me where I could find the Frankel family? Do you know what's become of them?) No sooner had I asked my question that one of the women expressed with a mix of surprise and excitement "*C'est le fils de Rosa!*" (It's Rosa's son!) Filled with tears, I turned to her. Someone, someone was left in Bruxelles who knew my mother, and recognized me now, 13 years later, by my resemblance to her. I do look much like her. Two women and one man came to me. We greeted one another like those of us who remained reacted when we just found another one who remained, like long-feared-lost friends, though I truly knew none of them. But one of them recognized who I was because she had known my mother. They filled me in with some of what they knew. The butcher shop was closed soon after the Germans invaded Belgium. They knew that one of the girls, Etty, the oldest of the 3 Frenkel children, owned a fur shop. They would locate where for me. I don't know where they looked.

They knew she was no longer called Frenkel, she was now Etty Pietruchka; she and Edouard Pietruchka, her fiance in 1940, had married. I suppose there were phone directories. They found the address of the store; they called and told her, the son of Rosa was here. They were given an address some dozen or less blocks from *rue de la Querelle*, gave me directions, greeted me again with pleasure and smiles and sent me off, as if I should rush to get where I was now going. I had no trouble finding my way. When I got there I was greeted by Etty who was as if in shock. “*Henri, Henri, mon Dieu, c’est bien toi!*” (Henri, my Lord, is it really you!) Three kisses, one on alternating cheeks, mutual staring at one another, and a big hug. My God, it was unbelievable, it was joy, it was joy. I had some family left. She had some family left. Just one of me, but 6 of them still then. Etty closed the shop, which looked as if it was being evacuated, and it was; Edouard and Etty had moved to a better location, *rue du Marche-aux-Herbes*, across the street of one very short 10-foot-wide *ruelle*, “little street”, that connected *rue du Marche-aux-Herbe* and the majestic *Grand Place*. From their store, in one or two minutes you were in *Grand Place*.

Etty took me home. It was a memorable reunion. Edouard, Etty’s husband, and their perhaps 10 year-old daughter, then my only child-cousin, Micheline. Then came Alda and her husband Sally, and my cousins’ father, my uncle Frenkel, limping, as he long had, since his left foot had been amputated due to a serious infection that turned gangrenous. I don’t know whether he had diabetes; though when his infection occurred we were still far from penicillin, and then even from sulfa drugs, so that even a simple non-diabetic infection could have turned very sour. Sadly, my very much-loved cousin Joseph was away then and I much regretted that he did not join us; but he too had survived. I would not see him till a number of years later.

Joseph, who was about 8 years older than I was very special to me; of course in their own way, each one of these cousins was and is. But Joseph, more than his older sisters Etty and Alda, seemed especially friendly with me, aware of me, his little cousin. His parents, my uncle and aunt were very lovely to me too, but still Joseph was special. As a young boy Joseph had been struck in the head by a horse—how I never found out—which resulted in his suffering a left hemi-paralysis (paralysis of the left side of his body, arm and leg) for which he had accommodated very well, having full use of his body as well as arm and leg, though his shoulder was lower than the right, his arm a bit more arched, his hand tending to hang at rest, and on walking his left leg dragged a bit, he'd slap his foot down and his body lurched a bit. He had also lost his left eye and wore a prosthesis (a false eye). With all that, he was really a vigorous young man. But his spirit was what so struck me. He was warm, friendly, outgoing, and seemed to go his own way. He did what he wanted within reasonable confines of family responsibility and concern. He really had guts. For example, I learned later that, rather than run away as so many of us did, when the war against Belgium started, Joseph crossed *La Mer du Nord* (The North Sea) to England, where he joined British forces to fight. His physical handicap limited his capabilities, though I am not certain that those who made that determination were right, as a result of which he was taken into the Coast Guard part of the military. He later told me, true or not, that once when his ship was attacked, they had to swim back to shore. Knowing Joseph, he would have done that.

Though I did feel Joseph's absence, I could not believe that here I was with Etty and Alda, Uncle Frenkel—Aunt Frenkel had died of illness a while back—and the husbands, Edouard and Sally. And, pleasure of pleasures, I had a new little cousin, one

born during the war, after my mother and I had left. Micheline was then about 10, sparkling, bright, loving, a ballet dancer or some local reputé even as a child. It was clear that in little time, and my cousins chuckled about it pleasantly, Micheline had a crush on me, in which I thoroughly delighted; and I was very nice to her, in fact, I adored her amply on my part. Uncle Frenkel seemed very worn. He was happy to see me but all that had happened showed on his face; he looked tired and somewhat depressed. I knew he had seen much pain, my dear almost-gruff uncle; he looked it. Thinking of him makes me think of how I look on my coming-to-America picture, “with the eyes of adults”, as Judy and Milton Kestenberg wrote “eyes [that] were terribly serious, expressing the ‘sorrow of two thousand years of Jewish diaspora’”⁶. It was past-recapturing, a happy recapturing of what I feared might no longer be touchable; my family of origin. My cousins Etty and Alda of themselves were living

⁶ Judy Kestenberg and her husband Milton Kestenberg wrote this chapter, chapter 7 of the Kestenberg and Brenner book referred to before, in which Polish Dr. Adina Blady Szwajger described what she saw in the faces of many of the Warsaw Ghetto children. access to my past, the past the Nazis stole from me. Alda, Etty, Joseph, then my younger cousin Joseph, the only one of my cousins I did not like, and my *Avenue Fonsny* cousins, Nellie and David, children of the David (their last name) Family whom I also really loved, these cousins were the group of my generation I knew best. Etty was the eldest of all of us. She was also, and she still is even now in her 80s, the *grande dame* among us. When I found them in 1953, Edouard and Etty had developed a thriving haute-couture

fur-coat salon (store). As I saw it, though I could be mistaken, Edouard was the artist and head of the atelier and Etty was the administrator and presenting person in the business. They had and were doing very well. Edouard, to whom Etty had become engaged just before the war broke out, was a smiling, friendly guy, a wonderful saxophonist who serenaded us one evening with “Come on and here, come on and hear, Alexander’s ragtime band”, the lyrics, in French of course, going through my head at the time. He was an artist through and through; no wonder they succeeded in their haute couture venture, when you Etty’s administrative brains to the mix. Edouard died not long after my 1953 visit the Bruxelles of some acute illness. I later learned that during the war, Etty and Edouard had put less than one-year-old Micheline in hiding with a Christian family where she stayed for nearly two years, in order to prevent her entrapment in the event that Etty and Edouard were interned in some camp. Try as I have on several occasions, I have not been able to get the full story of just where and how they hid or stayed low during the war years. While I am very reluctant to be clinical in this story telling, I wonder if, though they are very devoted to each other, the early childhood separation of Micheline from her parents may well have played a part in the harshness that at times surfaces in Etty and Micheline’s relationship.

Alda and Sally, who are very dear to me, I found, were then working in their own two-person atelier making very elegant gloves and purses that they especially liked to sell to a line of store-clients they cultivated in Italy. Which is why Alda loved to throw some Italian phrases at me and later, at Rachel and me (Rachel, my wife of 47 years at the time of this writing). Alda and Sally married soon after the war, and my meeting Sally was the start of a now long-existing relationship of a quite specific character; one heavily endowed with humor and deep affection.

To find these cousins, Etty, Alda, Joseph (even though absent in July '53), my new Micheline, their husbands, my uncle Frenkel, made losing my past less total; not all of my family was exterminated. And I have wondered what happened to the David family, Nellie, David, their mother (their father had died years before the war started)? That is still an open question. Why have I not searched them out more directly, more vigorously, that question I shall take up later? I was deeply soothed by finding these remnants of my family, it lessened a little the sadness that progressively became part of my fabric as we rushed away to France, then as we were herded first to Toulouse, then Ricibidou, then Rivesaltes, then my escape-enforced separation from my mother, then my going-to-America separation from her, which turned into our ultimate separation. I left Bruxelles again by train, but this time, taking my time, a bit somber, but with a gut-felt mellowing. I was struck on my way back to camp in Bamberg by catching sight from some distance of the Cathedral in Koeln; it looked like it was on the railroad track. The train's slowing down appreciably on approach to Koeln, gave me a chance to get my camera and take a few shots of it. For a bit it looked as though we would go right into the *Dom* (cathedral), about which Heinrich Heine wrote ("Lyric Intermezzo") and Robert Schumann put to music in the latter's *Dichterliebe* (Poet's Love, a cycle of songs). The *Dom* song, number VI of the cycle, the music more than the words, sat well with my mood,

Im Dom da steht ein Bildniss auf goldenem Leder gemalt . . .

. . . die gleichen den liebsten genau.

(Within the cathedral there is a painting [of the madona] on gold leather . . .

. . . [whose features] resemble those of my beloved exactly.)⁷

⁷ My translation.

and, the piano brings the song to a close in an extended mellowed somber passage, left hand octaves and right-hand syncopated melody, descending to the final minor cord. Was I thinking of my mother?

Savic's mother told me what happened to my mother. I found out from the most reliable source at that time, that my mother had been among those sent to Drancy, the near-Paris detention camp, train-port for convoys to the death camps in Poland. These shipments of internees were Vichy-France's contributions toward filling their quota of Jews requested by the German Nazis in Occupied France. I found this out during my second, this time a 10-day furlough, in October 1953; again I went from Bamberg to Bruxelles, but this time by way of St. Raphael, the environs of Toulouse, Paris, and then on to Bruxelles.

The first leg of my trip was to St. Raphael. Because it was on the way, I stopped in Milan for an overnight just to see it, and especially to pass by and visit La Scala. My stay there was brief; I was eager to get to St. Raphael. I am amazed to this day about how warmly I felt and feel about St. Raphael. That, of course, is where I stayed for nearly one year after my escape from Rivesaltes. *La Villa Mariana*, one of two OSE homes near the Mediterranean, where we starved/survived on delicious chic peas—after the rutabaga garbage we ate in Rivesaltes, chic peas were delicious—, in a warm surround of really caring adults. Then I remembered the three social workers, the ground-keeper and cook, Inez, and her cute side-kick, Julia. I remember Madame Masour visually and with positive feeling who, though I am uncertain, may not have been a constant presence in the homes, though I do have a photograph of her with the group of boys in the home. And I remember best Mora who taught me my first words

of English, and Aranka of whom I have two photographs. As I remember it, in 1953 the changes in St. Raphael were minimal. In our visit 45 years later, everything had changed so dramatically, a milling tourist area now of melted small towns with no discernible boundaries, to my deep chagrin, I could not find *La Villa Mariana*. It got swallowed up somewhere and even with local help, I could not find it.

But it was between my visit to St. Raphael and going on to Toulouse that I first learned what happened to my mother. Savic's mother had survived Rivesaltes and the war. She had eventually communicated with Savic and let him know where she had gone to in Southern France. I have no idea how she selected this very small town coming out of Rivesaltes. She was working in a needle factory in this town, perhaps it would be close to a village. When the time came, I had asked Savic for her exact whereabouts, which he provided me with, and I decided to try to visit her. Savic's instructions were good. It was not difficult to find her when I got there. I found her at home, and had the opportunity to spend a few hours with her. We sat at her kitchen table, she had prepared some tea. We did not immediately go to the question of my mother. I asked her about herself, how she was now, what she was doing. She was working in the needle factory in town. She was of course quite older, but she seemed to be in good-enough health. She was one of these small, wiry, women of vigorous stock, obviously intelligent. And she was welcoming, warm, and sad. Her husband now was dead; I didn't ask of what, how, where, when. Neither she nor I felt the need to talk about that. She was eager to know about me; she had seen Savic earlier, he had come to see her. I told her some details of my roamings, of where I was now, of what I was planning to do, by then having decided I would leave music and go into Medicine. I had decided this during my two years of time to think while I was in the Military. I

asked her about my mother. She told me that my mother had been sent away on one of the shipments of Rivesaltes internees—everyone knew, destined for the extermination camps in Poland. I heard the jarring news; collapsed inwardly; soon I was numb. Time slows as I write about it; nearly immobilized now, pensive, dulled feelings, heavy, sad—words don't tell well enough; I don't tell well-enough. A heavy feeling of loss; lying on top of rage that is sequestered right now. Then, nearly 50 years ago, Savic's mother was aware of my reaction; what could she do? I wanted to know. I asked her. She told me. She was thoughtful and sympathetic.

Our talk shifted to my trip then, in October 1953. I told her I was going on to Toulouse, then would spend two days in Paris, and then to Bruxelles to see the family I had found 3 months before. With lightening of our conversation she told me that Michel, Savic's younger brother was in Paris and would no doubt love to see me. She gave me his address; when in Paris I would see him; I wanted to, I was eager to look him up. I left her feeling very troubled, weighted down by what she had told me, accepting what had happened; I was moving on, life had to go on. I had to get the train to Toulouse.

My stop in Toulouse was no more than that, a few hours there and then on to the train to Paris. I got out and just walked the streets of that old city. I had no destination there. And I found nothing noteworthy to see. I didn't have the time to go to Ricibidou; I didn't particularly want to go there. Nor did I want to search out the hospital where some 10 years before, coming out of a freezing snow storm my mother and I had walked in there and they had treated my ingrown toe nail, courtesy of the Vichy-France government. My military leave time was limited and I much preferred to

spend a couple days in Paris and then my remaining several days in Bruxelles. I caught a late train to Paris and arrived there the next morning.

It was a bright day when I arrived in Paris. Within walking distance from the train station, I rented a room for two nights in a pension, a simple, attractive enough, 3 or 4 story house on *la Rive Gauche* (the Left Bank of the Seine). Settling in was simple. It was good to be in Paris; the pleasant excitement of the city and of being there facilitated my suppressing what I had experienced visiting Savic's mother only the day before. My misery softened by being in Paris, I followed my intention and with pleasant anticipation called Michel, Savic's brother. He was excited to hear from me and we met. Both days we walked the streets of the Left Bank, went to Montmartre, sat and ate in sidewalk bistros, talked, talked and talked. About him, his mother, Savic, me, his work, his plans, my plans; we did not talk about his father—enough is enough. We separated promising to see each other again; I believe we did once in New York many years ago. My pleasant stay in Paris over, I went on to Bruxelles where I stayed for 4 or 5 days. Amazing how after having found each other again in 1953, our relationship resumed where we left off in 1940, modified only by two factors, that 13 years had passed and we now were all adults, and that we all had gone through terribly painful, very frightening times, words too feeble to convey. We have seen each other a number of times since but not without another loss of contact, most likely caused by my lack of staying in touch with them. But let me quickly add that they don't stand innocent in our loss of contact either since they slackened in their communicating with me, and between my moves from Pittsburgh, to New Orleans, to Cincinnati, and then to Philadelphia, and their moves within Bruxelles, both in their homes and workplaces, we lost touch. That was remedied by our son Karl during the summer of his sixteenth year, an adventure I

shall touch on later. In October 1953, our second reunion, I spent all my time with Alda and Sally, Etty and Edouard and Micheline. Joseph was still away; so was Uncle Frenkel. In fact, I saw Uncle Frenkel on my way back to Bamberg. He lived in Liege then and I visited him there before going on to Germany. In Liege, he greeted me at the train station; Uncle Frenkel was somber as we walked, he limped, to his home. He was not so well and skirted my inquiries into his health. He was driven it seemed to me to know one thing, how well did I read Hebrew, did I pray, did I go to Shul? I had had my Bar Mitzvah, that pleased him, but did I go to Shul. I know I disappointed him on these counts, I did not read Hebrew well as he hoped, I did not pray as he did daily, morning and evening, and I did not regularly go to Shul. I did not want to hurt him by sharing with him what my experiences had wrought, that at that time, while I was totally a Jew, I was atheistic. I was one of those among us who found much difficulty with the religiosity of Judaism, totally Jews, but Jews with doubts, questions, and an inability to reconcile with some of the liturgy and “the experience of God.” I will talk later about what the Holocaust did to me and to my experience of religion.

A Discrepancy Regarding the History of Foreign Jews in Vichy-France

The timetable annotated by Vivette Samuel in *Sauver Les Enfants* does not match the timetable I have all along assumed in my own case. I know that, being quite young then, on the matter of the specificity of certain dates, I may be wrong; I know that in some way my timetable may be distorted, and that Vivette Samuel who was an adult at the time of these occurrences is most likely right. But it is possible that we are both right. If my timetable is simply wrong, then I know that it is the by-product of memory distortion caused by my young years and the pain, which the indignities visited

on us by our host government caused us, all of us Belgian Jewish asylum seekers, and others too of course. Intense pain can distort not only memory, but also active and passive thinking processes and many other things, psychological and biological within us. This admission of uncertainty should not be taken beyond the way I intend it; if some of the specifics I assert are wrong, it does not extend to my being wrong about what happened to me and others like me; it happened.

Here are some dates I remember unequivocally:

May 10, the German attack and invasion of Belgium started;

Within about two weeks, in May, 1940, we left Bruxelles by train and traveled to South Western France to a region north of Toulouse;

Within two days of our leaving Bruxelles we were given asylum in France—the only asylum we got there, the rest was imprisonment—in “Village” for about 4 months; then

About mid-September 1940, we were evacuated by order of and courtesy of the then Vichy Government and taken to a Detention Station (Camp?) in Toulouse from where

Within several days, late in September, we were interned in Ricibidou.

Vivette Samuel states⁵ that on September 27, 1940, the Germans imposed an ordinance that a census be taken of all the Jews *in the Occupied Zone* of France. If I am right in my timetable, the French were only taking a census *in the occupied zone* where the (German) Nazis ruled, whereas *in the Free Zone*, then in the hands of the Vichy-France Government, the internment of foreign Jews was already well underway. Samuel indicates that on October 4, a law was passed that “authorized” the internment of “foreigners of the Jewish race” in special camps and that in October 7,000 Jews were

⁵ *Sauver Les Enfants*, page 221.

interned in Gurs, a concentration camp not far from Rivesaltes. I believe my mother and I were then already in Ricibidou.

In June 1941, after I had already escaped from Rivesaltes, Vichy-France ordered a census of the Jews—not clear whether this meant Foreign Jews or French Jews, or all Jews of any color, nationality, and denomination, just Jews! The Vichy Government, according to Marrus and Paxton, made a point of trying to yield up the foreign Jews to the demands of the German-Nazis in the hopes that they might spare the French Jews. Of course, the Germans were not as considerate of the French Jews as Vichy, the government headed by Laval then, no longer the aged and ailing Petain.

I make several points here. One, is that the foreign Jews, who had specifically sought asylum in France, were, according to Marrus and Paxton, targeted for special mal-treatment by the Vichy-French Government supposedly in an effort to save the French Jews from the hungry Nazis in the Occupied Zone. Second, that somehow, the “hidden Nazis” among the Vichy-French authorities seem to at times have been more eager than their German counterpart to rid themselves of the Jews, the foreign Jews first, but then the French Jews as well. It is in line with Marrus and Paxton’s taking note of what they record as fact, that the first French shipment of Jews from the concentration camps in the then still “Unoccupied Zone” arrived prematurely in Drancy (detention camp outside of Paris from where Jews were deported for extermination Auschwitz), embarrassing the Germans who were not yet ready to receive them. Such eagerness and alacrity among those French authorities! I am not totally unsympathetic toward the Vichy-French Government; these were hard times in terms of food and other

life conditions, and no doubt all the foreigners who sought asylum there were an enormous burden to the country, and those that governed. But this then 11 year-old boy would say that it was not one of France's glorious days.

My mother seems to have timed my escape from Rivesaltes wisely. Two weeks after May 1, on May 14, 1941, the French police arrested and interned thousands of Foreign Jews. Although Samuel does not specify whether this occurred in the Occupied or Unoccupied Zone or both, that they were interned in Pithiviers and Beaune-la-Rolande suggests that this occurred in the Occupied Zone. But given the Vichy Government's tendency to eagerly cooperate with the Occupied Zone Nazi authority's rulings, it might have been even more problematic than it was for me to escape after May 14.

If, in the argument I presented here in pointing to the discrepancy between my remembered and reasoned timetable for events current at the time and that of Vivette Samuel, if I am proven wrong, then ascribe error to my pain-derived imprecision of memory and the rage I have long carried toward the Nazis, the German Nazis, but also, and especially so, toward the French Nazis among those in the Vichy Government who directly orchestrated what happened to us.

Of Burdens that Follow from What Befell Jews in Europe of That Day

One of the largest torments I continue to experience in consequence of what happened to me, to so many of us is, at least for me it is, the pain and the burden this has caused my wife and our three sons. And now my grandchildren have begun to ask me, every time with a note of seriousness and caution, "Zaida, were you in the war?"

Their fathers know that I want them, and now that I want their children to know, that they can say to me, ask me, anything about it all.

For my wife, as I have seen again and again, she is tortured by what happened to me, she suffers guilt that it happened. Rachel, to whom I have now been most gratifyingly married for 47 years, is not a Jewish in origin, but in her personal non-denominational religious universality and her taking on the burden of my life in addition to her own, she is more Jewish than many Jews I know. I am troubled, even to this day and will always be, by the fact that she feels so guilty about what happened to me. I wish it were not so, but it is. As to why she feels guilty; two possible answers come into my mind on that question. The first is that somehow she feels guilty at not having been robbed, ravaged, humiliated and starved as we were. And the second is that at times when she is angry with me she wishes me ill, and she is then gripped by that magical thinking residuum from childhood, that her wishes are what made it all happen to me. So, I think that she feels guilty that she was left out of the misery and that she sometimes wishes that what happened to me should happen to me. But it's more complicated than that. I am not in her head so that even after 47 years of being together very nearly every day, I can't be sure just what it is she experiences. What I think may be working most in the mix of feelings she has is the dilemma of not having shared this miserable experience too. I think my sons may experience this too. It's not knowing with the knowing that comes from having experienced it oneself. This not knowing, especially of so traumatizing and life re-organizing an experience, creates a lack that is not easy to live with. It becomes a burden. Not having experienced it—however painful “it” was—becomes a burden. I can tell my wife and my sons that it is not worth going through this kind of experience to know, and they know this; but there

still is the pain of not knowing because it was not experienced. There are many things we cannot know of our mates and even our children, but they do not create a burden. But not having shared their suffering does.

It torments me that my three sons, each in his own way is tormented by what happened to me. When our oldest, Erik, was a freshman at the University of Chicago we had occasion to visit him—I was among those invited to present some of my work at the 50th Anniversary of the Chicago Psychoanalytic Institute. We were in Erik's room on campus, wanting to know all we could about his goings-on at the University, how he was, and all that, like all parents whose kids do so well just never tire of hearing about, and it was good and exciting. By the way, he wanted to know, who were we having dinner with shortly? I told him we were eating dinner with Sandy—the second of the Wagner girls, the one who I lives in Evanston. He looked momentarily puzzled, I thought, so I elaborated, “You know, the Wagner family.” He just burst into tears. Of course I may be wrong, but I look at Erik, and can say the same for Karl and Josh, and at times I see how burdensome my Holocaust past is to him, to them. A week ago, after telling us again that they, he, Erik, his wife Andrea and their children Sophie and Ben, would be with Andrea's Aunt Leila for Passover and not us, I showed my disappointment; I don't try to hide what I feel with my family; I'm not good at hiding my feelings anyway. For reasons I will not even try to guess—whatever my sons may think, I refuse to be a shrink with them—Erik in essence said to me, “Heh, it's all your doing. Last time you couldn't have the Seder when we wanted you to so we went to Aunt Leila's” or something like that. Two days ago on the phone, we came back to this issue. My reaction of disappointment had troubled him. He had experienced it, as he said, as if I was saying, “After all I've been through, how can you do this to me!” I

didn't know whether to get angry or cry; but I sobered quickly. Our sons, Erik, Karl, and Joshua, are remarkable human beings. I have never said anything like that to them or to my wife. I have never felt, "After what I have been through, how can you do this to me." I have never felt it, I have never said it, and I never will. At those moments Erik seems to me mournful but also tired of it, I think, wishing he, could just put the thing to rest already. And I love that by some accord, some decision he made many years ago, he nearly always sits to my right at dinner—not necessarily at other meals, but at dinner, yes.

I wish he could put it rest, and that Rachel could, that Karl, and Josh could, that we all could, already. But I hear Primo Levi's curse—my personal elaboration and interpretation of it—if you don't bear witness, "may your children turn their faces from you". And, of my own inner need, I don't want to put it to rest. I want to remember it, I have to remember it. And it has left its mark on my sons.

When Karl was 16, in 1975, he decided and arranged to spend his summer in Bruxelles to study cello with Edmond Baert, the cellist of *Le Trio a Clavier de Belgique* (The Piano Trio of Belgium) who resided there. How he found Edmond Baert I am not sure, but I assume that he asked his teacher of that time about a fine cellist in Bruxelles. Kids amaze you, you know; mine certainly amazed me, and still do. That's why I had the wisdom of becoming a child psychiatrist. Karl wanted to see and get to know Bruxelles, as I have inferred, understood, because it was where I spent the remembered part of my childhood of which I speak with very fond memories, because he knew Bruxelles means, positively, so much to me. He went then perhaps also with a secondary, or perhaps primary, mission to relocate my cousins whose addresses and telephone numbers I no longer had—they do have telephone directories in Bruxelles—

as I noted before, because of our respective moves from the time I had found them in 1953. Considering what I am saying one might get the impression that I am irresponsible, or uncaring, or foolish. I feel secure enough in my knowledge of myself to know that I am not irresponsible and I certainly am not an uncaring person; that I am foolish, no doubt, sometimes I am. I ascribe my losing touch with my dear cousins to the pain that thinking about them, about our past has and continues to cause me. There is much love between us, much love I feel for them; but all evidence points to the fact that the pain they represented to me, and they still do, was sufficiently great that I had avoided a second search for them. No doubt, this painful research in times past had some part in my choosing to become a psychoanalyst, an explorer into individual human pasts, like an archeologist, Freud said. I had lost connection with my cousins and Karl set off “to be” in Bruxelles, to further his cello studies, further strengthen his French, and to find my again lost cousins.

It did not take long for him to find them. From his telephone calls to us and much subsequent living evidence of it to this day, Alda and Sally, Etty, and Micheline received Karl with excitement, and undertook to find him a place to stay, not that he spent much time there, to feed him, all in all take care of him in princely fashion. My impression is that Karl felt like the conquering hero; he had a right to that feeling. He went, found, and really conquered them. That conquest has lasted decades. Just this past June (2002), at Gregory’s wedding—Gregory is the son of Micheline and Jean, who just married Sandra—Karl, his wife Sabina, and their sons Elliot and Arthur were a big hit. But it is evident to me that while the journey to re-establish contact with my cousins, with his Belgian cousins, has given Karl much pleasure, my Holocaust experience weighs on him and intrudes in his life in a number of ways of his life. In

July 1997, Rachel and I went to Barcelona for international meetings. While there we had decided we would go to Rivesaltes and St.Raphael, in a tracing back of the path I had traveled many years before. When we told this to Karl, he wondered if he and his young family could join us on his return from South Africa. Since Karl was spending part of that summer doing a medical training rotation in South Africa, he and Sabina arranged to join us in Barcelona, and then went to Rivesaltes, Beseige, St.Raphael and Bruxelles together. It was a memorable trip. I was aware of Karl's concern for us, Rachel and me, and for Sabina and for their two children, especially Elliot, who was then 5 and very curious about everything that came his way; so it was in Rivesaltes. Arthur was just 1 then, and of course not yet into the meaning of life and the burdens distributed to us by fate. We were all oppressed with that visit and Elliot generated some questions he would later ask me. This visit roused Elliot's question about the toileting facilities in Rivesaltes, clearly incredulous that this is where his Zaida went to rid himself of bodily wastes. And later came his question, with seriousness and caution, "Zaida, were you in the war?" And 5 years later, in 2002, Elliot and Arthur, asked many questions about what happened then.

"Zaida, were you in the war?" is also a question Rafi asked me, more than once. Rafi, Josh's son, is very into stories and histories of war. Joshua too, like his brothers, carries the burden of what happened to me. I am wary of assuming that I know why Josh chose to become a scholar in Hebraic-Arab philosophic discourse, specifically the variable interpretations of Plato by Moses Maimonides (Hebraic) and Alfarabi (Arab), each a brilliant philosopher of the 10th and 12th Centuries respectively. Of course, there is more to what he is doing than I can grasp. How else do I explain to myself his focused interest in Israel and in the Arab world but that it has a bearing not only on

Jews but, specifically on me? He was the only one of my sons who had a Bar Mitzvah, all his own planning and doing after he had gone away to College, a problem gifted to him by his adoring father who was all screwed up about God, and about Hebraic liturgy, or for that matter any religion's liturgy; his father, me. I'll talk about that problem in a moment.

The sins of the father will be visited on the child. Fine; I understand how it happens; I am a shrink, after all! But what sins did I commit in all this? The pains of the father will be visited on the child. That's what applies to us; and it makes me weep. A father could not have better sons than I have; no father has. And, I am really in a quandary. I want my sons and my wife to put it to rest; but I want us to remember it, and I want to remind others of it, hoping they will not let it happen again, nor wish to perpetrate it again.

My problem with God and with Liturgy

As I said a moment before, our son Joshua was the only one of our sons who had a Bar Mitzvah. It was all my doing not Rachel's; I am the one who was so conflicted at the time that our sons were not Bar Mitzvahed when they were of age. My torment on this question does not diminish over the years. I was reared in a Jewish family where some of us were Conservative Jews and some were Orthodox Jews. My mother was not observant, nor was my Aunt Ester; but the Frenkel family was Orthodox, though mostly it was so for Uncle Frenkel, but not for Joseph or his sisters Alda and Etty. Before the war, I had started Hebrew school. The war interrupted this training and no effort was made, either on my part or those around me, to institute such training while we were in the camps. I was not an ardent religious Jew. However, as I said earlier, I was intent on

having a Bar Mitzvah and did so at 14, the year I arrived in Pittsburgh. I should say that even though I was intent on having my Bar Mitzvah, even before the Holocaust I did not feel an ardent conviction about God. God was simply part of our life; no need to question. I had my Bar Mitzvah at 14, in Pittsburgh; gracious gift of the Wagners.

After graduating from High School in Pittsburgh, I spent one year at Penn State, not altogether certain that I wanted to pursue a career in Psychology. I was unhappy. I turned to Donald Steinfirst with whom I stayed in active contact. When he asked me how I was doing, I let him know that I was not happy in Psychology, that I was a very unhappy, frustrated singer. I needed to be in Music. Donald, the Music Critic of the Pittsburgh Post Gazette, one of my absolutely dearest friends, a father figure for me, arranged for me to have auditions with Vladimir Bakaleinikoff, the Assistant Conductor of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, then under the direction of Fritz Reiner, another with Jan Peerce (in the Steinfirst home), and another with Fritz Dorian, Musicology Professor at Carnegie Tech, as Carnegie Mellon University was then known. Through Donald and Fritz Dorian's help, I got a four-year scholarship to Carnegie Tech. The point of this detour in the context of religion is that to add to that scholarship, for survival needs, I was a Cantor in a Reformed Synagogue on Forbes Street in Pittsburgh. I was a Cantor who gave it all he had devotedly, lovingly, but with a feeble conviction about either God or the Liturgy I was singing about. I want to be clear. I loved being a Cantor; I love being a Jew. But I was not an ardent believer in the God about whom I sang with so much very genuine feeling. The feeling was about being a Jew; it was not about a God I love and know exists. That's one of the problems for me; I don't know if what seems to be portrayed as God exists. I will soon be 74; I still don't know about God. I am not anti-God. I am not atheistic. I am more of what I understand to be the

Spinoza school of thought about God. There has to be something bigger than we are; “bigger” here stands for well beyond us in unique dimensions. What force made it possible for us all to be here? That force is clearly not man-made. How did we all evolve? The question is intended to be an evolutionary question. What force created the building blocks of whatever theory of creation we want to invoke? These questions, naïve, I recognize, leave me with no answer. There is something bigger than we are, much bigger. It cannot be humanoid, with all due respect to Michelangelo. God is in everything, therefore everywhere. Therefore, I am not even agnostic; I think there is something powerful that has made it possible for us to be here. No need to say more on this here, though I have many questions about it.

But my problem with God is not the only problem I have with my religion. And my problem applies equally to other religions. Jews have “the chosen people”, Muslims have infidels, if you’re not Catholic you will go to hell. If you’re not the way I am, you are bad news and will end up in ashes. Well, we all end up in ashes anyway, in ashes or decomposing protein and all its magnificent complements. But very specifically, as a Jew, I have serious misgivings about our being “the chosen people”. Joshua, my dearly beloved son, the scholar, tells me that we were “chosen” to safeguard the covenant, the scrolls of Torah. It is not, he assures me, that we were chosen as superior to others, non-Jews. He may be right; his interpretation is much more knowing than mine. But when I say the words, I object, I don’t think it’s right, I don’t think it’s the way it should be, not in my world. We are all chosen or none of us is chosen. I can’t recite such words without cringing. No, I cannot accept that Jews, or anyone else, Muslim, Catholic, Hindu, Protestants, and any other brand of human being is “chosen” over the others. I refuse to accept that. And that makes it very difficult for me to tend to, and

attend, religious services, Jewish, or other. I'm old enough to ask, "What to do with this world of ours?" We have to accept each other, any other, and co-exist without murders.

My questions about God, and the assertion that we are "the chosen people", make being "religious" very problematic for me, very. Arthur Mirsky, a senior colleague who died years ago, once said to me after we had talked for quite a while, "You're a very religious man, Henri". I was surprised by his read of me; I have not thought of myself that way. Then, no longer a believer in "God", no longer an atheist, I was puzzled by Mirsky's measure of me; but I took his statement positively, appreciatively; I felt his meaning it that way. I'm not sure just what made him say that. But if Mirsky saw religion as I recently heard someone say—I didn't catch his name—as, to paraphrase him, "a personal interaction steeped in love between an individual and God", and not as bodies of liturgy steeped in divisive, chauvinistic principles and man-made laws—not that all man-made laws are bad—then Mirsky saw me. And it is more this than my ruminations and uncertainties about God, the chauvinism of the liturgies and the abuses to which their malignant applications have led, that has caused an uproar in me at times in my life. Over the years since I have been an adult, when on occasion, in the service of celebration or of mourning by or for someone I value I have been in a synagogue, or for that matter in a church, I have felt distress when out of respect for others I have read or sung liturgy passages that preferentially praise the believers in the faith. I don't like being "the chosen", I don't like being threatened with the fires of hell, I don't like being an "infidel"; I don't like being one of the preferred who is assured a place in heaven, and I don't like being an evil outsider guaranteed a seat in hell's flames; all of this being doubtful that is either a heaven or a hell.

Outstanding among these times, three to be exact, of distress, of very conscious fairly fierce inner conflict about religion, arrived when each of our sons approached the age of preparing for and having a Bar Mitzvah. Even to this day I bemoan the problem gifted to them by their adoring father who was all screwed up about God, Hebraic liturgy, or for that matter any religion's liturgy; his father, me. I might well have been conflicted about religion even if my life had been untrammelled, free from the Holocaust. But I know, that what happened to us, definitely has left me with the question that may underlie my doubts about God, "If there is a God, how could this have happened to us!" I know that many Jews who experienced the Holocaust came out of it more fervent believers in God and in the observance of liturgy than before. But I also know that many among us have found their belief in God fractured if not shattered. I know this from personal encounters with other Holocaust survivors; and these have as I have, abandoned going to Shul, even on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. I am not certain that these survivors feel as troubled by the liturgy as I do; I have not yet talked with these friends about it.

I know I am trying to explain why my sons did not have a Bar Mitzvah. I am still conflicted and sorrowful about it. It may puzzle some, it may not, but I regret that my sons did not have a Bar Mitzvah. Yet, were I faced with the same matter now, I don't know what I would do. In this and it so many matters, Rachel has always been open, receptive of my conflicted wishes, supportive. She is aware of my dilemmas, of my Holocaust derived conflicts, and many other things. Our oldest son, Erik, overtly was the most distressed by my conflict with religion. He was the first of our sons to have to deal with it. When his friends were preparing for and then had their Bar Mitzvahs, there were a number of occasions when he was able to convey to me his

distress of being the only Jewish kid he knew who was not having his Bar Mitzvah. It was a difficult time for both of us. I have welcomed his telling me on a number of occasions, how I screwed up religion for him. It is true. He is right. And I am full of a painful mix of feelings, some remorse, some self-acceptance, some mourning; but most distressful is having screwed it up for him. I know it is the same for Karl and for Josh. Josh and Lenny, a converted Jewess, are the most observant of us. I truly delight in their 9 year-old son Rafi's growing mastery of Hebrew. And I wait uneasy to see what my sons will do with their children as the approach 13. There are five of them, one girl and four boys. Whatever they do, our acceptance and support is guaranteed.

More complex an issue is the fact that I married a woman who is not Jewish. I object to the supposition that I did this with the intention of avoiding Judaism. From my first girlfriend Sara, a very low-key affair, when we were in St. Raphael, I was 12, to several other lovely girls-women over the years, and eventually to Rachel, two were not Jewish. I confess that I did not restrain myself, as do so many Jews, Catholics, Muslims, and no doubt many of other religious denominations, to women or friends of my own religion. I trace my struggle with the question of God and religious liturgies, specifically Jewish (Hebraic) Liturgy to my college years. I truly felt a need for universalism in religion—not in the Protestant religious sense—in the overall religious sense. In fact, in college I joined the World Federalist movement, and while I am not now an active member—if that movement still exists—I am still of that persuasion. I was attracted to the person; it may seem naïve to say, to the person, not to the person configured to a prescribed doctrine. I don't find it paradoxical that, it mattered to me that the woman I loved and love would unreservedly accept the fact that I am a Jew, not a Godless Jew as Peter Gay said of Freud, but a Jew who cannot accept the constraints

and biases of Jewish Laws and Liturgy. It is a mess, I know. I am a religious mess. I hold dearly to observing Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Pessach, Chanukah, and other Jewish traditions, but I have selectively modified how our family has observed these. I don't know where my personal interpretation of God and religion might have taken me if I had been given the chance to continue my life of origin; I know that the Holocaust heavily influenced the path of Judaism I have taken. I say again, to others my Jewishness may seem incomprehensible; no doubt highly Orthodox Jews would throw me to the dogs. But to me, I am a Jew; my position on this supports no argument to the contrary. But my religious beliefs, explications, that's a mess. And I visited them on my wife and our sons. My wife, Rachel, has indeed accepted my being a Jew, has joined me in my Jewishness, even though, she, like me, is a universalist when it comes to religion and the equality of human beings. My sons are forging their way through the religious mess I brought to them; other than an occasional complaint that I have fouled things up for them in this arena of life, they understand why and how my mess got to be what it is, and they are truly forgiving about it.

I know that the Holocaust heavily shaped my personality and my destiny. It has beclouded our home, our family life. It has unconsciously pushed me along paths in my work that only after the fact did I recognize as deriving from my Holocaust experience. This includes my choosing to become a medical healer of people, especially of children, to focus clinically on the motivations and meaning of human behavior, to focus in my research on the origins and the development of aggression, and in my later years to work toward the prevention of emotional disorders in children and the prevention of violence and malignant prejudice. I did not plan to do these things with the recognition that they owe their thrust to my Holocaust experience. But I know now, that they do.

Many memorable events attach to my Holocaust experience, like my painful conflict about going to Israel, my first visit to Germany, especially Munich, my return to Rivesaltes, and more.

CHAPTER 8

IN THE AFTERMATH

On My Journey in Israel

I learned with a new sense of it that I still was not ready to come face to face with some aspects of my Holocaust experience. My accommodating to, learning to live with that past has been part of my life; it is a constant. In this writing, I am doing that. In the late 1980s, I was invited to give a lecture in Jerusalem. I had not yet gone to Israel and was very eager to go, though obviously some unconscious force had been at work in me that had prevented me from going there to this time. I considered the invitation to lecture an opportune time to do so. I contacted several professional groups in Israel to let them know I was coming and would feel privileged to lecture to them. Two other professional centers extended me an invitation that fell within reasonable time of the date suggested by my first prospective Jerusalem host. In 1989 Rachel and I arranged a trip that would accommodate my lectures and our chance to visit the country. Plans were in place several months before our scheduled journey.

Within days of that time, when plans were in place, I began to develop a very unpleasant, persistent and rather intense visual photosensitivity. Any modestly intense light aimed directed at my eyes was intolerable; I had to look away. This was totally new; I had never had this symptom. My ophthalmologist found nothing abnormal in my eyes and was puzzled by my photophobia. Clinically trying to be helpful, he suggested I try some antihistamine eye drops. They seemed to help, but did not eliminate the symptom. Being a psychoanalyst and in the habit of looking within

myself for causes of my puzzling behavior and reactions I began to explore what I was experiencing. I find dreams enormously useful to accessing unconscious goings on. In wondering what's wrong with me at this time, my associations took me to understand that I was not yet ready to go to *Yad Vashem*. I could not have gone to Israel and not have gone to Yad Vashem. I don't need a metaphor; it would have been insane to go to Israel and not go to *Yad Vashem*. I had had my first truly allergic reaction; I was not emotionally ready to go to Israel. With much distress and some embarrassment, I excused myself to my hosts in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv; they were gracious and asked me to please let them know when I next plan to come to Israel.

What was I not ready to face in *Yad Vashem*? My eventual trip there helps to clarify. When we went to *Yad Vashem*, once on entry into the grounds, I felt myself shaking like a leaf. It's as if I was going to encounter ghosts of my past. I was inwardly frightened; I don't think I showed it, but I was. It's as if I was now going to get confirmation once and for all that yes, my mother, my father, my brother, my cousins Nellie and David, were all dead, exterminated. Was I not yet ready for the whole truth and nothing but the truth? I still don't know the whole truth and I'm still not totally ready for it. I knew that my mother had died in Auschwitz. Even to this day I don't know if my father and my brother ended up there too. In the late 1980s I was evidently not yet ready to go to Israel and find out.

Early in this narrative I mentioned that I had recently developed an acute eczema. I am pleased to say that three months into this writing, my skin is nearly totally cleared up. But it is now clear, and my Dermatologist helped me to find what I believe is the causative factor in my acute (rather sudden in onset) and intense eczema. My massive skin reaction started after I made contact with some poison plant. I believe

something other than poison ivy. It was treated in good time and with a good regimen but it persisted quite longer than expected. I had then started to read Primo Levi—I ended up reading several of his books and still have some others on my coffee table at home. Primo Levi struck me. I did not then know to what degree. My skin reaction persisted waxing and waning. Six weeks later, we took me off medications I was taking known to have some dermatologic side effects, beta-blocker blood pressure medication for a moderate systolic (the upper number) hypertension, and a beta-blocker for my mysterious right eye glaucoma, the representative of some unexplained eye abnormality that has probably been with me for years. And when my skin still resisted healing, my psychologically minded Dermatologist, Bernie K. asked me, with cautious sensitivity, if I was worried or troubled about something. He, the Dermatologist felt odd asking his shrink patient, me, if I was having some emotional problems. It struck me to the core; yes, I was in the process of writing my story about the Holocaust. When I told him I was a survivor and that I had to bear witness, his eyes filled with tears; he didn't know, he said, it was an privilege to treat me. I was damned glad that he was treating me, a Dermatologist who knew about the impact of psychological stress on the skin. From that day, my eczema started to fade. Bernie helped me become aware that my writing this story was affected my total self, mind and body. My wife knew it would too; she told me it would. It has taken me long to tell my story, I have not been ready till now; and I was not, in 1989, ready to go to Israel.

Ten years later, in 1999, I went to Israel. The draw to Israel had an added dimension, it was compelling. My psychoanalytic colleague Yolanda G., member of the Israeli Society, and on the Faculty at Tel Aviv University had informed a Palestinian colleague of our work on prevention of disorders in children via optimizing parenting. I

received an email from the Palestinian colleague. Would he come to their community center to help them develop programs for optimizing parenting in their community? My collaborators Cecily Rose-Itkoff and Michael Pearlman, mental health types like me, were equally interested in the prospect. We could go to both the Israeli communities and the Palestinian community and present our research, share the prevention strategies and materials we had developed. The possibility of contributing, by means of mental health prevention strategies and instruments, to the Israelis and the Palestinians efforts to live together in peaceful co-existence, was exactly the type of goal in our sights. When I felt that we might be helpful to that end, I could go to Israel without undue trepidation. The three of us went, with itineraries to the Israeli Ministry of Education in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv University's Department of Psychology and School Counseling, to the Palestinian Mental Health Community Center, and to *Neve Shalom/Wahat al Salam* in Israel.

On our arrival, on our walking into the Tel Aviv airport, I was swept by a feeling of sad joy, tearful joy on seeing signs and posters in Hebrew characters; a feeling of comfort set in. And as we approached Jerusalem, the rocky sweeping hills, the far-reaching vales, the sweep of Jerusalem filled me with awe. I had not imagined it so beautiful and at the same time so grand. And it didn't take long for me to tell my colleagues Cecily and Michael that here, I felt at home. Walking from our hotel, which was situated across the magnificent wall that surrounds the old city, to a restaurant, the chatter of milling people, I felt an amalgam of feelings, safe, inner calm, quiet joy. All around me, or most anyway, were Jews, just like me; like no where else I felt, I could go to anyone and say, "Heh, I'm a Jew, *Ich bin a Yid*", and feel no threat. Even in America, "land that I [truly] love", I can't do that. I could in Israel. There's nothing

like it. Maybe, having been incarcerated, having smelled death, just because I am a Jew, made me so keenly aware of this feeling of freedom from fear. But perhaps too, every Jew feels this way, even the millions who very fortunately were not subjected to the sadism of Nazis. I did feel, I am at home here. It's different than being at my real home, outside of Philadelphia, where I very much feel I am home. Returning from Israel I felt that there are two countries for which I would fight if the existence of either were threatened, and to the health and well being of which I am committed, America and Israel. And this I know is a major factor in my eagerness, and that of my co-workers Cecily and Michael, to accept the invitation from Palestinian colleagues to help them develop strategies for optimizing parenting in their communities. Based on our research, we are convinced that optimizing the rearing of children toward emotional good health would bring with it the reduction of violence and malignant prejudice. We felt that if both Israeli and Palestinian communities reared their children toward achieving good mental health, that their peaceful co-existence would be facilitated. This was in November 1999. It is tragic that extremists on both sides of the Israeli-Palestinian divide have for the past two years reduced to ashes succeeding efforts toward peaceful, egalitarian co-existence. By this, the world has lost a major model for resolution of conflict between ethnic groups, a long existing social disease that has been and is to this day spread all over the globe.

So for a number of reasons, going to Israel was most meaningful to me, and this time I was able to go without developing a psychosomatic reaction of alarm and protest. I think that feeling compelled in my prevention work gave me no choice but to go. Cecily, who spent a year in Israel many years earlier has cousins and friends there. She arranged for Yochi, a much-liked friend who is a Guide to various sites in Israel to

optimize our visit by helping us around Jerusalem. Yochi guided us through the old city, first by taking us to the model of the city, guiding us through its parts, and then by taking us through the old city itself. Touching the massive Wailing Wall brought a rush of history-feeling with it; a feeling of long, long communal reach back into time; deeply moving.

Sustained by what we were doing there with the Israelis and Palestinians, and by Yochi's remarkable facilitation of absorbing more of Jerusalem than we could have done without her, I was able to go to *Yad Vashem*. Yochi guided us there too. As we neared *Yad Vashem*, I felt the weight of my inner misery creep into consciousness. I was overtaken with grief when I came into the darkened cave, a cemetery, I felt, with an eternal torch burning, surrounded by tombstone slabs, names carved in light: *Auschwitz, Bergen-Belsun, Birkenau, Dachau, Treblinka . . .* My memory, of just 3 years ago, is foggy here; I believe there was a tomb-slab with *Rivesaltes* light-carved in it. I stayed there a long time; I don't pray. I mourned. And I raged silently, "If there is a God, how could You let this happen to us". *Yad Vashem*; The Hand of God. I didn't remember at that moment all the other Holocausts; ours is unique, but not the only one; the Communist Holocaust, the Chinese Holocaust, the other ethnic cleansing Holocausts over the centuries. I dragged myself through the *Yad Vashem* exhibits numbed, the heaviest weight of sadness—just as I did earlier in 1999 walking through our Washington DC Holocaust Memorial Museum, that time with Rachel, who was equally smashed by it. I went to the documentation station in *Yad Vashem*. I wondered if I could learn about the fate of my father and my brother. I didn't even think then of Nellie and David; only part of my brain was available to the effort. Profoundly disappointed, I found nothing about my father or my brother. But that might be good.

The Nazis kept good records; I understand that the Jews in the Lodz Ghetto kept good records too. Might they still be alive? I am making that search now; better late than never; just add a large dose of self-recrimination for not having done that before, long before. We walked through the grounds, I picked three pods of St. Peter's bread, pods yielded by a small tree, that served a food for St. Peter I was told. It was not permitted; I felt like I had in Village, many years before, stealing whatever fruit and vegetables we could to supplement our limited diet; food was beginning to get more and more scarce then. I was troubled recently when I found that one of the *Yad Vashem* pods had disappeared.

We left *Yad Vashem*, my colleagues and I, exhausted. Knowing my story, Cecily and Michael seemed aware of my state; I noticed then that they had kept a vigilant eye on me, supporting; I had not been alone there. They were not all encompassing, my friends, all protective of me like Rachel is as times like these; but they were very good to be with. Once we moved on from *Yad Vashem*, the air seemed lighter; a burden was lifted. I had metabolized something of my past; difficult to say how much, some. The memory of the visit lingers.

I know that my visit to Jerusalem, and especially to *Yad Vashem*, was made possible for me at this time by our mission there. We were bringing our prevention work aimed at optimizing the well being of Israeli and Palestinian children and their parents, and we wanted to contribute to efforts made at peaceful, egalitarian co-existence in that part of the world so valuable to Jews and Palestinians. Given that, I now know, my prevention work has its origins in my Holocaust experience, and that one of its key aims is the prevention of violence and malignant prejudice, I knew I was going to Israel not just to mourn at *Yad Vashem*, but also to help protect our people in

our land. I could go not just to remember the Holocaust, to cry and curse, but to help growth in and make secure that oasis for Jews. Besides the Israeli Ministry of Education in Jerusalem, we also went to Tel Aviv, we lectured, had seminars and talked with key administrators at the University there, we also went to *Neve Shalom/Wahat al Salam*, and we went to Gaza.

In November 1999, it was intimidating to go to Gaza to meet with, lecture, seminar, and talk with Palestinian mental health colleagues of collaboration in helping them develop programs aimed to improve the lives of children and parents. It was intimidating to walk from the Israeli side through “No-man’s Land” to the Palestinian side, and wait on that side to be picked up by our host. The delay in our being picked up was keenly felt by us and was much relieved when our host did arrive and we went to their Community Mental Health Center. We were very well received, given opportunity to lecture and present our ideas, research, and programs, and had occasion to visit another Health Center site. The prospect of collaborating with these Mental Health colleagues intent on the well being of their people was most welcome. I felt, as did my American Jewish colleagues, that we could contribute in a meaningful way to the betterment of the Palestinian parents and their children. We want more growth-promoting parenting everywhere; our research has shown that the more optimally children are reared, the less likely they are to deal with problems by violence and malignant prejudice. And we visited a refugee camp. The poverty, the dust in the streets, the transience of housing accommodations, the little that we saw, gave us much cause for pain and serious concern. To be sure, we have such sights in America too, and there too they are cause for serious concern. In the Middle East, striking contrasts between the Israeli side of “No Man’s Land” and the Palestinian side made us painfully

aware of differences in life on each side that, even as they stood then, in 1999, did not bode well for the future. The problems of peaceful, egalitarian, co-existence were palpable. We really felt that the collaboration we were seeing between Israeli and Palestinian Mental Health professionals aimed at optimizing services for the communities in need, was fruitful and could open ways for bettering the lives of the people in the communities reached. In 2002, I am deeply saddened by the loss of such efforts, the loss of possible collaborative improvement and enriching of services to Palestinian children and adults, one of the major casualties of the hostilities that have been ongoing there for the past two years. Efforts have to be made to bring us back to the constructive period in the Middle East that ended in 2000.

My Post-Holocaust Travels in Germany

I first visited Germany in 1953-54, courtesy of the United States Military Service. I was stationed in Bamberg, Bavaria, for one year. Post-World War II Germany was a much safer alternative to Korea, then actively at war, my other stationing choice. I think that being stationed in Bamberg in 1953, rather than say in Munich, facilitated my being in Germany. Bamberg is a small city, with much charm, and opportunity for walking, sitting on a park bench and reading, and meditating about a lot of things. Here I was, in defeated Germany, I, in U. S. uniform. I felt protected by my uniform. I felt protected knowing that many Americans like me—well, more inborn American than I since I was now an American for only about 5 years—were there, and that they would come to my rescue were Nazis to suddenly appear and try to force me into another concentration camp. Though I felt safe, this unbearable and unbelievable thought did at moments come into my mind. Amazing how having been traumatized,

one dreads a repetition of the trauma even when highly unrealistic, nigh totally impossible. Bamberg was pleasant; but I did avoid the few boisterous taverns near our base, even when I was with my friend Stephan, a young German doctor who worked at our Dispensary. We became good friends. He invited me to his home, out of town, for Christmas—can't recall where it was—where I was very nicely welcomed. So much so in fact, that I was given a couple presents along with the members of his family getting their fair share of gifts. They were lovely people, Stephan's family. Bamberg also has a fine symphony orchestra and I can see the large unimpressive straightforward hall, high-ceilinged like a church, but simple. From my base in Bamberg, off duty, I visited Wurzburg several times. Unfortunately, this is also where on a rainy day, while rushing a soldier in emergency to the hospital there, our ambulance slipped on the tram rails, we crashed into a wall, and I sustained a concussion that knocked me out. I'm fine; I recovered, after ten days in the Hospital there. I also visited Nuernberg, which did not make a notable impression on me; it was a typical, lovely, small city. But I also visited Munich; that had special meaning.

My visits to Munich

Going to Munich, knowing its meaningfulness to the Holocaust, was and has been challenging for me. I first visited Munich in 1953 while I was stationed in Bamberg. The occasion was Pessach 1953; the military was putting up a Seder for us. Men came from stations within reasonable reach of Munich. It was memorable to have a Seder in Munich, the city that above all others represents the center of Nazism, the city the Nazi Fuehrer preferred, the city that epitomizes *Kristallnacht*. I was in the military, I was in uniform, and even then, I felt very uneasy in Munich, and unlike

Bamberg, I did not like the Germany Munich represented to me, at least not my first visit there. For me, Bamberg represented the city of Brahms and Schumann, perhaps because there, on a park bench, I would read Rilke's Duino Eligies, in German. I even tried my hand then at translating them; it was only a transient effort aimed at helping me learn German better. I have never formally studied German; but my early childhood Yiddish helped me understand a fair amount of German. In addition, my studies of Schubert, Schumann, Beethoven and Brahms *lieder* heavily engaged me to try to understand German, with ample use of dictionary too. Bamberg represented that about what is German that I value; that by which I feel enriched. Munich represented that of what is German that frightened me; that injured me; that I abhorred.

This is one of my dilemmas, but it is also a large factor in my teasing out "German" from "Nazi". I am not the first to think along these lines; others have written about it though I can't remember who else expressed experiencing this dilemma. My dilemma arises from the fact that I love *lieder*, music in general, but *lieder* especially. Though I long abandoned singing as a career, I still think of myself as a *lieder*, a classical art song, singer. Though there is a great French art song literature, meaningful but lesser Italian, Russian, and other such literatures, the German art song literature, including Schubert, Schumann, Brahms and Beethoven, is magnificent. German is to *lieder* what Italian is to opera. Furthermore, I think that Beethoven is the greatest genius of the fields I know and of those with which I am just acquainted. Then came 1933. Then those Germans came. Many of my friends and acquaintances hate Germans, won't buy German cars or cameras or anything. Peter Gay, the remarkable Historian, also a Psychoanalyst, wrote this too in his memoirs of his childhood in the Berlin he loved, *My German Question* (published in 1998), his recollections as a Jewish

Boy in Berlin until 1939; he too has friends and acquaintances who refuse to buy anything German. I understand their sentiment. I hesitated some before I bought my first BMW. So my dilemma, that of a Jew, is that I love some Germans, and I hate some Germans; I love those whose creative genius was universal and embraced the human race; I hate those who were or are Nazis, who represent chauvinism in extreme, who believe others-than-themselves should be exterminated. But this goes beyond Germans; I also hate French Nazis, of which there were many in Vichy-France, and American Nazis (at times cloaked in Ku Klux Klan attire), and Nazi types anywhere. I cannot, do not, hold all Germans responsible for what the Nazis wreaked in Europe, nor do I hold all French responsible for what the Vichy-France government did, nor all Italians for what Mussolini did and stood for. We become culpable too when we hate all Germans, or all Palestinians, or all who-ever “all” may be, based on their nationality, ethnicity, color, religion.

My first visit to Munich was one of trepidation and conflict. I did not want to go and I wanted to go. Why I did not want to go needs no more explanation. Why I wanted to go does. I needed to see it with my own eyes. I needed to see the place, the buildings, the streets, the city squares, the Germans of Munich. And I needed to go there, feeling that I was still alive and their Fuehrer was not—though he robbed me of my first life, my mother’s life, my original family’s life, my community’s life. I had no trouble getting to the base in Munich where the Seder was held. Long tables, a number of them; there were perhaps a couple hundred of us. It was good to be together, having a Seder in Munich, a touch of having survived. It was a bit of a conquest, but it was not comfortable; I would have been more comfortable elsewhere in Germany, Wurzburg or Nurnberg would have been better. The next morning I walked the streets to see

Munich. I remember cranking my neck to look at the moving figures on the large Church's façade, staring while walking at the entrance of one of its Universities, avoiding contact with the people. I had no desire to stay there one minute longer than I had planned and caught my train back to Bamberg with relief. Munich elicited repulsion in me; I felt much more comfortable back in Bamberg.

I did not return to Germany for many years. Over the years, my work, research, clinical and educational, has at times given me opportunity to lecture in Europe. A colleague from Munich, Lotte K., who occasionally came to an annual symposium in Philadelphia hinted at and eventually asked me if I would be willing to come to Germany, to Munich specifically, to lecture at Institutions with which she was affiliated. Her hesitancy came from her knowing that I was a Holocaust survivor. She indicated that she was not surprised when I said I would think about it. Nor, I later found out, was she surprised when I never got back to her on the question. A few years later, my friend from Munich, Lotte, communicated with me to ask me a favor. Would I kindly see to it that Suzanne H., one of her Grant Recipients who was coming to International Meetings in Montreal, be helped to find her way as needed. Since I was going to be there, and it was Suzanne's first time on this Continent, would I keep an eye on her? I was very pleased to do this. Suzanne and I got along very well. As we had occasion to talk she told me that some people in Munich really wanted to hear what I had to say regarding my work on aggression, and would value my doing some clinical seminars in child analysis. She let me know that Lotte really wanted me to come to Munich. I agreed to do so; this was facilitated by the fact that it coincided with other lecturing commitments I then had in Europe.

This led to four visits I subsequently have made to Munich to this time. In April 1992, I first returned to Munich. I was wary; I was no longer in U. S. uniform, and I was coming alone, no Medical Corps Company to back me up. But I did have a friend and a host, Lotte K. I got to Munich in late morning, settled in, slept a bit, and met Lotte in late afternoon. My first lecture was scheduled for the evening. Due to circumstances, Lotte and I ate in a Bavarian Tavern with which she was not so familiar. That was fine with me. It could have been quite nice. But after we settled in, not far from our table there were 3 or 4 about 30 year-olds who became increasingly rowdy as they consumed more and more beer; they became loud and somewhat coarse. I think that Lotte became aware of my discomfort; she, herself was probably troubled by them. She commented on their rowdiness and apologized for having brought me here. Though I did not share this with her, I had become very uneasy when their noise turned to rowdiness. I associated their loudness and coarseness with some of the film clips I had seen of “brown shirts” brawls in taverns and on streets; and I trembled. I think I hid my distress well. And maybe not. I feel that Lotte made sure that we were out of there as soon as we could.

The fear I felt briefly in that Bavarian tavern was a blip, a spike, on the baseline fear I have felt when I have been alone in Germany. Although I absolutely insist that “German” is not equal to or means “Nazi”, that the German Government, under the Nazi regime, programmed the Holocaust for Jews, makes me more afraid in Germany than elsewhere. When Rachel and I attended a meeting in Amsterdam, which was then followed by another meeting in Koeln, I experienced such a rush of fear as well. The morning after the symposium in Koeln, habituated to exercise, I went into the street and started my “slow-jog” trek. It was early, perhaps 6 or so in the morning. I progressed

nicely, enjoying the view of Koeln in the waking hours. But as I went on my projected trek I unexpectedly heard some quite loud, boisterous noises, and then noted that on my path, across the large avenue, were gathered a group of young people, men and women, probably waiting for a bus or a trolley, who had in a burst of rowdy playfulness suddenly gotten very loud and coarse. I was gripped by fear. It was no doubt my own inner stuff that got stirred up by their noises. They probably didn't even notice that I was across the street, jogging. But I felt that dread of being in danger. Just because I was in Germany and I heard some coarse, rowdy young guys!

I came to know that Lotte had not wanted such a Bavarian tavern experience for me. I came to know it in the course of the fairly rapid evolution of our relationship; we soon became very warm friends and have continued so over the years. I learned from her that her mother had been a fervent anti-Nazi German during the war.

Furthermore, Lotte had long been in a common law relationship, including living together, with Hans K. Hans, a brilliant man who speaks little English but does very elegant French—we speak French together—was a strongly determined anti-Nazi. His history made that clear to me. I feel deep affection for these two friends who in their own way suffered too. They lived in a country, which at that time was doing things odious to them. My dear friend Lotte continues to suffer the agony of depression, which I believe in part is due to her having been part of what caused me, and others like me, so much pain. Lotte, had the good fortune of inheriting an industry business of which, in addition to being a Psychiatrist and Psychoanalyst, she was the Chief Executive Officer. As I construe it, Lotte was left a handsome amount of money, which she assigned to a business-related Foundation; and she committed a substantial part of the funds of this Foundation to studies of the Holocaust, particularly to the

effects of the Holocaust on the children of survivors and the children of perpetrators. She is very well regarded in her community. This was attested to by the crowd that attended the celebration of her 75th birthday. The remarkable thing about this gathering in January 2001 was that Lotte asked for, and got, the speakers on this occasion, a Symposium in her honor, to be constituted of professionals in our field who were Holocaust survivors, Anna and Paul O. and I, and several others who had in some way suffered from the Holocaust. It was a memorable occasion for us and for her and Hans.

Lotte arranged for me to return to Munich on two other occasions. Prior to the 2001 symposium in her honor, Lotte arranged a lecture tour for me in April 1997, at the University of Ulm, the Psychiatry Department at the Hamburg Medical Center, and at the Koeln Psychoanalytic Institute. By the way in Ulm I spoke about the development of malignant prejudice. I was impressed with the favorable reception my remarks elicited.

Then Lotte arranged to have me invited to Berlin in November 2001, and to Munich.

My visit to Berlin -- 2001

I was invited to give a lecture on our research in primary prevention of emotional disorders in children to the Annual Meeting of *Die Liga fuer das Kind* which was held in Berlin in late November 2001. This was about 2 months after September 11. Lotte arranged for a young Psychologist-Psychoanalyst AnneMarie to serve as my guide, the way I had served Suzanne H. in Montreal. I was in Berlin for nearly three days. I saw some of Berlin the first day I arrived. On first sight, Berlin seemed vastly

different to me than Muenchen or Koeln. The boulevards were wide, the space was large, the air open.

Anne was most gracious and facilitating of my stay in this widespread metropolis, Berlin. I like Berlin; maybe because it has long been in the fore-guard of artistic and social progressivism, because it was the home of Kurt Weil and Bertholt Brecht, and because of its many broad open-air Boulevards and its chain of communities. Not that there are not drab areas of Berlin like in all major cities in the world. East Berlin nearly depressed me. Or maybe it was Anne's taking me to the remarkable "monument to the burning of books," that celebrated Nazi primitive, odious, festivity. The monument is buried in the center of a large cobble stone square, a barren plaza. A light surges from the ground. As you approach the source of light in the square, you see that the light indeed does come out of the ground. When you are there, a glass floor opens to view a cellar-like room walled on all sides with white book shelves from ceiling to floor. This is a library; but all the books are gone. I felt as if stuck between the eyes by this stark, agonizing, starved, underground monument.

Yes, like many, I too welcomed the reminder of war, the damaged *Gedaechtnis Kirche* on Kurfuerstendamm, the bomb-damaged monumental church, left damaged as a memorial to World War II. These monuments vivified the memory of those times. But I was most reminded and moved by our visit, guided by Anne, to the Jewish Museum of Berlin, a striking metal zigzagging five stories high structure that is an art work in itself, heavy metal sheets punctured with small windows, like a massive prison. Or a tank. I was grateful that AnneMarie knew how meaningful it would be for me to go to this massive metal architectural monument to Jews in Berlin. Lotte had told me that she would ask AnneMarie to take me to the Museum, I think a Memorial, really. But, while

I was struck by the imposing prison-like architectural sculpture I saw, what struck me most was the line human beings had formed, mostly Germans Anne told me, to get into the museum. We had limited time. The line extended so far that, overwhelmed by the fact that so many people, mostly Germans, were lined up to go in, many kids among them, I told Anne that we did not have to time to wait to go in, that I did not need to go in. That what I saw on the outside was so deeply moving, it was as if we had gone in and seen what there was to see. Yes, there are Neo-Nazis in Germany, there are Nazis in American, and elsewhere, but here were so many people waiting in line to go into the Jewish Museum in Berlin!

My lecture to the *Liga fuer das Kind* went very well; when the audience was told that I had just come from the U. S., two months after September 11, the audience's reception was really welcoming. My lecture in East Berlin was a much more sober affair. My Psychologist guide, an East-Berliner, educated me on some stark difference between East and West Berlin. I told her that a study devolving from her observations regarding the ways children were reared in East as compared to West Berlin would most likely document some of the harsh effects of totalitarianism on the rearing of children. The next morning I left my generous and dedicated hostess and arrived in Munich, welcomed as usual by Lotte, where I lectured on some post-September 11 reactions of malignant prejudice and potential violence.

My visits to Germany have not been easy. I was highly conflicted about it. I hold to where my ruminations on the issue have taken me: "Nazi" does not equal "German." I learned that when I was in Ricibidou and especially in Rivesaltes. The Vichy-France government was the onerous authority that imprisoned us. The Vichy-France government, similarly as with the German government, was driven by

Frenchmen who were Nazis at the wheel. Should I hold all that is French responsible for what the Vichy-France hoodlums did to us? Should I abhor the French? Should I abhor the Germans? The Poles? The Russians? After all, the Poles and Russians, in their centuries old pogroms, over time may have outdone the German, French, Italian, and other Europeans Nazis who executed, but fortunately failed at the “the final solution”. And shouldn’t we also include the Italians? Ask Primo Levi; well, it’s too late to ask him directly, but he left wrenching evidence of their contribution toward our extermination. And the Hungarians? They too participated in sending Jews for extermination to Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsun and Dachau Should I hate all Europeans? What do I do with my need for Beethoven and Schubert, and Rilke and Baudelaire, and Schiller with his “*Alle Menschen werden Brueder . . .*” (All humans will be brothers [siblings, really]). The question is endless. The only solution for me is to do away with erroneous dichotomizing driven by chauvinism. People malign, torture, or destroy others because they are of this nationality or that religion, this ethnic group or that race. Blind, stupid, insane. It’s hate that drives malignant prejudice and the destruction it wreaks.

Yet with all this reasoning and my conviction, to which I hold, I have trembled in Germany. I have not in France; maybe it’s because French is part of me and German is not; maybe it’s because some Vichy-French Nazis collaborated with the German Nazis, but it’s the German Nazis who sorted out who would go to the left and who to the right when the victims got to their death camps. The Nazi French, sadistic and shamefully enfeebled, selected and sent Jews to their death; the German Nazis, empowered by their Nazi Fuehrer and his degraded Lieutenants executed those Jews. Perhaps that is why the French do not frighten me; the Germans can, at least some

Germans. And that's why in Munich and in Koeln, I felt moments of fear, real though imagined fear. It may have been my unconscious realization of this vulnerability in me that made me anxious about going to Germany. It may be that in some way I have not yet sorted out—I don't think I have all my faculties at my disposal when I explore this domain of my life—going to Germany would have been the stage toward my own extermination in Poland, where I was born. No, I don't cherish the thought of dying where I was born. I say again, what a dreadful return to her birthplace, for my mother. Maybe all of this has to do with the fact that I have not yet been able to go to see the remains of Auschwitz; so many have; but I did return to “visit” Rivesaltes.

Retracing Past Travels – 1997

In July 1997, Rachel and I attended the International Psychoanalytic Association's biannual meetings in Barcelona. Since we would then be close to Perpignan, Rachel and I decided that we would go to Southern France and then proceed on to Bruxelles. We would spend a few days at several points of historic interest to me, to us as a family. In the south of France our itinerary was to visit Rivesaltes, then proceed north and eastward on the Mediterranean coast to Montpellier, veer northward to Nimes and up to Besseges, to visit Rachel's mother's origins. Besseges is a village set on both sides a small river surrounded by rather steep hills very reminiscent of the surrounding hills of Pittsburgh, where Rachel's family settled in the U.S. We would overnight there, then proceed to Marseilles, on to the Cote d'Azur to Frejus, a stone's throw from St.Raphael. There a few days, and we would then return to Marseilles, drop of the van we had rented in Perpignan, and then by train to Bruxelles. We would be there a few days and then return to the U.S.

My Return to Rivesaltes – 1997

I cannot vaunt my return to Rivesaltes; it was not a triumphant return. It was no Rhadames returning from his victory over the Ethiopians; may be it was a little like Odysseus returning buffeted by, into uncertain belief of, the Gods. I did not return triumphant; but I did return, some fifty-five years later, sound and sane, well gratified of life, with my dearly loved wife, one of our sons Karl, his wife Sabina, and their Elliot and Arthur, to visit the tomb of my past misery.

For me, for Rachel and I think for Karl and Sabina as well, the visit to Rivesaltes was the destination of largest impact. Unlike the other places where we would stop, this one was marked with insult and degradation; the visit filled with trepidation and mournfulness. The day before we all left Barcelona, Karl, Elliot and I trained up to Perpignan in order to pick the van that would give us a degree of travel freedom in following our itinerary in South France. This was the start of my visit to Rivesaltes. It was heralded by my falling flat on my face, so to speak, when we walked out of the train station in Perpignan. It was a duly symbolic welcome back to the train station from which I sprung a significant distance between Rivesaltes and myself. Perhaps it was a re-enactment of my escape from Rivesaltes, replaying the moment I fell, the whole stretch of my body on the sandy vineyard ground through which I was running like hell toward the road to Perpignan. As I believe I said earlier, I did not really fall on my face but gashed my knee, as I tripped on a sidewalk I had not noticed in my beclouded state. We were then looking for directions to our car rental. My fall was no big deal, the opinion of the two physicians in attendance, Karl and I; we marched on to the car rental agency. Got the van and drove back to Barcelona; Karl requested that he

drive since I had proven a bit shaken by our entry into this past chapter of my life. We had gotten out of Barcelona fine; but had not taken close enough notice just where we exited the city; on our return, finding the point of entry back into it was just a bit bewildering. Which entry should we take? In any case, we guessed on one and got to where we needed to go.

Early the next morning we were full of pulling everything together, ourselves, the kids, our baggage, and packing it all in the van. We left Barcelona; our stay there had been very pleasant. Karl wanted to drive; he felt in the right because he wanted to take charge of the vehicle with this wife and children in it; Karl, echoing his mother, often tells me I drive too fast; I don't think so. But I think Karl may have had an additional motive too; he knew that this trip now was no longer a vacation for me. Our next stop was Rivesaltes. We traveled from Spain into France within an hour; we bypassed Perpignan. Seeing the road sign "Perpignan/Rivesaltes", my mood changed; I was going to a graveyard, a graveyard that held the tomb of someone, more than one, who had been viciously murdered, someone, more than one, I loved profoundly. Grim, I wondered, What will be there, what would I see? What would Rachel, Karl, Sabina and the kids, see? First we saw the road pointer to "Rivesaltes"; my gut sank. What an ugly name! I feel that silently now. We drove into French country, through open fields and vineyards, then into the village, Rivesaltes, looking for signs to where the camp might be or might have been. We stopped at the *gendarmerie* to ask about the camp, where is it? Karl, who speaks French fairly well, initiated our inquiry; I joined in. I was struck by the policeman's patient listening and sober, respectful, response. Did I expect him to spit at me? I may have; because I was touched by his slowly getting up, slowly telling us where to go, pointing as he gave us the directions. He was kind; no

doubt, I felt, he had done this a number of times before. We were not the first to come to visit their local concentration camp. He seemed not at all surprised or taken aback by our inquiry.

We got into the van and now slowly, we followed the gendarme's directions. The camp was less than a mile from the village. I felt that familiar gut sink, just as much physical as emotional, that grave pensive sorrow I know, when I first saw the remnants of that purgatory. And I felt a sweep of gratitude; the French had not destroyed the evidence; they had not swept it under the carpet as they of Gurs, another camp, some 20 kilometers from Rivesaltes. Where Gurs was, now lay a lovely village from what Sally, who had been interned in Gurs, later told me. No, Rivesaltes, the remnants were there. I was totally unaware that Sabina had taken hold of her camera and started to chronicle our approach, entry, and visit of the camp-site. The countryside stretches out, in the distance, south, in a haze one sees the Pyrennees. We entered on a short road and parked the car on the side. I dragged myself out of the car. Rachel stayed close to me; Karl, Arthur on his shoulders at the start, one eye on his wife, Elliot and me. Sabina, looking, occasionally asking a question about the camp, and as I later saw the evidence, taking pictures. Rachel looked, she knew all the answers, there was no need for questions; she stayed with me. At one point I took Arthur onto my shoulders; Karl and Sabina, and at times Rachel as well, tended to Elliot, then 5, curious, exploring, asking questions, and seeing more than I had expected.

From where we stood initially, the ruins stretched out on the right side of the road that cuts the camp into two sites. On the left side of the road, at some distance, there were barracks that had been much better maintained, that evidently were occupied at this time by some uniformed groups, most probably, of a police kind, not military.

The entire camp seemed to me to be 1 square mile, more or less. We held our attention to the ruins side of the road.

I felt sick. I recognized the remnants of what I had known. All the roofs of the barracks but a spot here and there, had collapsed into the shell fragmented-sections that had held up. The photos show dark-greenish coarse sparse vegetation, occasional spiny briar, the then prevalent low-growing bushes through which I crawled covering the sandy ground, as neglected as the barracks; the barrack remains dirty beige in the sun, gray on their shade side, orange-tan scaling walls, all looking dirty, weather beaten. Sabina caught a shot of Rachel seeming to explain something to Elliot, probably in response to one of his many questions; they were standing in front of one of the barrack-shells. Barbed-wire, rolled, crumpled together lay here and there, probably marking where the periphery stood; in one place a small stretch of it stood, leaning somewhat collapsed. In the photo of that stretch, Sabina caught a picture of me with Arthur in their backpack-type carrier on my back and, twenty feet ahead, Karl carrying Elliot. I think that Elliot must have wanted to be held by his father, perhaps sensing that this was a moment of wanting to be very close to his father. A face-on shot of them, caught by our very able photographer, showed Karl looking grim, serious and sad all in one; Elliot looks puzzled.

All the barracks had been one-level structures, about ten feet high. Among the ruins of those we saw up close, the barrack that seemed most still there, showed an entryway about 12 feet long still partly roofed, then the roofless dormitory-living-quarters stretching perhaps 60 to 70 feet. There were nine windows on each side, each nearly three feet wide, about 2 feet high, placed high on the walls, almost adjacent to the roof, so that one could not see out of them just by standing up. Of these barrack

remains, the walls were a thin shell of about 8 inches—cut across—hollow bricks covered with a layer of plaster; the floors seemed to be one sheet of cement. I took some pleasure in seeing the fragmented walls, no roofs, debris scattered on the remaining floors, of the boxes that once held us captive, against our own will. The shame of it spread over it all.

And then Elliot saw a remaining structure that looked different than the rest. He had been in there and asked me to come and look at it with him. I did; Sabina caught a shot of Elliot and me, with Arthur on my back, walking down the steps of this toilet-facility. Elliot had wanted me to see it, to answer his crumpled-up-face question, pointing to the hole in the cement slab floor of the walled stall: “Zaida, is this where you went to the bathroom?” His question, incredulous, sad, broken voice, touched me painfully. Here it was, live; what my children have inherited, now experienced by my grandson, Eli. It’s one of the most painful things in all this—what my miserable Holocaust experience has gifted my family with. These toileting facilities seemed to really have troubled Eli; they troubled me too many years ago much more than now. Eli made reference to it again five years later when we were together again in Bruxelles. In his uniquely sympathetic, intimate manner, identifying that he was going to say something for which he felt the need to prepare me, foreseeing the pain we were about to share, he said to me again, “Zaida, was that where you went to the bathroom?” Following that with a pause and, “You know . . .” [‘what I mean’ didn’t have to be said]. I put my hand on the back of his shoulder, “Yes, Eli, that’s where we went to the bathroom”.

Eli’s questions about the toilets in Rivesaltes, the war, etc. turned more complex in 2002 when we were again in Bruxelles, “Zaida, why did they do that to you?” How

do you answer your grandson who clearly needs an answer. I heeded the advice I give parents when they ask me how to tell their children something difficult to share, to explain, the best you can. Our 5 grandchildren ask me questions about it all, the two older ones especially, Eli and Rafi. Five years after our visit to Rivesaltes, when again, Rachel, Karl, Sabina, Elliot, Arthur and I were in Bruxelles, walking back from *Le Bois de la Cambre* (my favorite childhood park-associated memories go back there), Eli and Arthur were just wide open about some of their 9 and 5-year-olds' questions about what happened—their father, mother, and their Bubbie there, just holding an emotionally safe place for us, like a bubble, as we walked on *Chaussee de Vleurgat* to our hotel. Yes, (Eli,) those were the round holes in a cement slab where we emptied the waste products our increasingly skinny bodies found they couldn't let us keep. I didn't say that to Eli, I say it now, as I think about it again.

Other than for Elliot asking some questions, we walked through the waste land scattered with ruins silent, looking at one another at times, at times hugging to allay some of the pain. Photographic eye peeled, Sabina spotted Elliot picking some raspberries from a small bush; she then spotted a quite larger berry bush. They were not there years ago, when we were interned there. Some guilty wind might have blown some of these welcome seeds to this otherwise fruitless square mile. The surrounding area now was lush with vineyards and some less obvious vegetation. It was already past 1 p.m., the kids, who were really great sports letting us mull all this over, were getting hungry. Karl and Sabina reasonably felt we should soon look for a place to eat before the kids have a melt down. We got back to the van and got onto the road. From the height of the van, Sabina got a couple shots of the surrounding area, cut through with train tracks, captured on film, probably in memory of my having run over these tracks

in my escape from the camp. We were on our way out, but after about ½ mile or less, we saw two rocks into which were melded metal plaques. We stopped. The left rock held a symbolic arced metal frame stating that this is Rivesaltes and I can't recall the rest, nor can I make it out from the photograph. Perhaps it's because I was very taken with the text inscribed into the metal plaques on the right rock.

Rivesaltes, the monument. Rivesaltes, the ruins as monument, like the *Gedächtniskirche in Berlin* – monument to the destruction of war in Berlin – but Rivesaltes and these rocks stand as **The Ruins (Remains) of Rivesaltes as a monument to the ravages of Maligant Prejudice.**

The two rocks, Remembrance monument—photos in the photos book gathered, assembled, and created by Sabina. This visit to Rivesaltes in August 1997 caused a silent storm in me. I know it did so in Rachel too, and in Karl, and clearly Sabina was deeply touched by it too. Just seeing the skeleton of barracks and walk through the coarse prickly briar, just standing there--with my wife and one of our sons, his wife and their two young children--filled me with rage, made me feel weak and nearly overwhelmed with pain. But I also felt deeply victorious: I stood here with my wife, one of our sons, his wife, and 2 of our grandchildren. Rachel and I had replenished some of what my family had lost.

And standing there I was deeply appreciative on seeing that the post-WWII French government had decided to not erase the traces of Rivesaltes. This French government retained the ruins of the barracks and outdoor lavatories of that miserable hate-driven attempt at dehumanization of many terrified asylum seekers in their land. It furthermore was gratifying to see the two 6-foot brown rocks one of which bears the inscription, in French:

“Thousands of foreign Jews
 who had sought refuge in France
 were arrested and interned in 1940
 in the Camp of Rivesaltes in the Free Zone.

From August to October 1942,
 more than 2,250 among them,
 of which there were 110 children,
 were delivered to the Nazis in the occupied Zone
 by an act of authority, of the then
 Government of France.

Deported to the extermination camp of Auschwitz
 nearly all were assassinated there
 because they were born Jewish.
 Let us never forget these victims
 of racial hate and xenophobia.

The Union of Jewish Students of France
 The Sons and Daughters of Deported Jews of France.”

For 50 years this fact was suppressed, even denied in France. It was only in 2001 that French President Chirac made a public apology for the Crimes committed by the Vichy Government against the Jews in France. The French have not accounted for the fact that while the German Nazis exterminated not only Jews but also Homosexuals, Gypsies, and vocal opponents to Nazism, the government of Vichy France deported

only Jews to Eastern Europe for the "Final Solution". And the accounting should not stop there—America, “land that I love”, looked the other way too long as well.

Standing by those rocks, Sabina caught a photograph of Karl with Elliot on his shoulders, Rachel, her face shaded by her wide-rim hat, me, my face half-shaded too with Arthur riding on my back, barrack ruins in the background. Now we are all smiling, I think even Arthur, though he may be half-grimacing of hunger. We got back into the van and moved on. Following the vineyard bordered road, we came to a fork in the road, one sign saying that along this path we would find an *auberge* where we could eat; the other would take us to the highway. I could not stand the thought of eating so near Rivesaltes. I said so. But in a moment, whether it was urged by the disappointed faces I saw, or it came from within me, I felt, “Yes, let us eat here; let’s eat a fine meal to celebrate the fact that we are here, alive and well, and many of those who would have had us dead are gone.” We stopped at the *auberge* and had indeed a really good, very ample meal; but I must admit, that none of us seemed able to stomach the idea of eating blood sausage, which is part of the region’s menu. After this feast, not soon enough for me, we left that miserable graveyard.

Leaving Rivesaltes behind

We were on our way to Besseges. Besseges was a refreshing interlude in our tracing painful past travels. It took us away from the Holocaust. Located in a small river, substantial hills on both sides, the village with one main street, a massive church that serves the surrounding region, and across the river, the city hall and post office. After taking some drinks—non-alcoholic—at the village tavern, we searched for members of Rachel’s family. The church priest tried to help us but even with the help

of church records did not succeed in locating family members. We left Besseges disappointed but pleased to have seen where Rachel's family came from, got overnight accommodations, and the next morning were on our way to Marseilles. We went rapidly through Marseilles on a major highway, and proceeded to our next destination, Frejus, and from there, St.Aygulf, a few kilometers from St.Raphael. Now we could relax. And we did. Sabina's pictures of us on the beach tell the story. We are relaxed and smiles. We found a very nice restaurant near our hotel, where we liked the ambience and the food so well that we ate there all the nights we were in St.Aygulf.

While there, Rachel and I set out to find *La Villa Mariana*. I had forgotten that on my trip in 1953 I had found out that *La Villa* was then a hotel. Unfortunately, my inquiries at the St. Raphael Post Office yielded no useful information; they knew nothing of a *Villa Mariana* in St.Raphael and I was bereft. We set out to search for it, and this is when I was really made cognizant of how much things had changed, even since 1953, let alone, since 1941-42. St.Aygulf, St.Raphael, Boulouris, etc. were contiguous, melded together, into an extended metropolis of small towns, with further extensions on both ends. The Cote d'Azur had really become a highly valued resort area. St.Raphael, to me, had lost some of its unique loveliness, though I am certain that the locals did not mind. Despite my disappointment at not being able to find *La Villa*, nor of course, could we find *La Feuille* in Boulouris, our visit to the area was memorable. We left several days later, back to Marseilles. There, I was brought back to the train station where I had arrived after my then highly accelerated running away from Riversaltes. I did not recognize it at all. It too had changed much as had Sr.Raphael. We dropped off the van, waited in the station, then in time, boarded out train and were on our way to Bruxelles, direct. We wanted Karl and his family, the kids

in particular, to be comfortable enough during this long train journey, so we got first class tickets. Nearly the entire wagon was ours from Marseilles to Bruxelles. We arrived in Bruxelles, I was coming home, my old home, now my second home.

It is always good to be in Bruxelles. It was the first time, 1997, that Rachel and I were in Bruxelles with one of our sons, with Karl and his young family, wife Sabina, and Elliot and 1 year-old Arthur. I regret that Erik, our oldest, and his family, as well as Josh, our youngest and his family have not yet been to Bruxelles. Someday. Etty was there, so were Alda, Sally, Micheline and Jean; we even got a glimpse of Gregory, then in his late twenties, back in Bruxelles after several years in the U. S. studying, preparation for a career in Business. But I had one further regret, this one, a sad one. My very dear cousin Joseph, who had died in the early 1990s, did not have a chance to meet Karl and his young family. Joseph had been away when I first visited in 1953. Rachel and I were visiting Bruxelles when I saw him for the first time since 1940 in the mid-1980s, more than 40s years after we ran away from the advancing German troops. Our reunion in the 1980s, in his apartment in Bruxelles was intensely joyful for me and for him. I had known that he was alive but this was the first time since 1940 that I saw him. Rachel and I met his wife then, a woman who had stood by him through trying times. We liked them both. His sisters were not happy with him; we did not see them together. He told us of his “adventures” during the war, escaping to England and joining in the military effort of the Allies. He had also spent several years in Israel. His health, which for years now had been burdened by his hemi-paresis (his left side was all but paralyzed), was not in good order when we visited him and we talked about that too. I saw Joseph again on my next visit to Bruxelles in April 1992, on my way back from Moscow. In terms of his health he had deteriorated substantially then, and it did not

surprise me when soon after, I learned that he had died. To the end, our relationship was warm, a very special liking. To me he was a “real” human being, a man of integrity, fearless, loving, unpretentious. Rachel too like him enormously; she too found in him the traits I had known him for, for so long; there was no mask, you got what you saw; no pretense; and an uninhibited love, if he loved you. Well, I loved him and so did Rachel who saw him only once.

This visit to Bruxelles had an added special meaning for me, that I had the opportunity to go to one of my favorite spots in Bruxelles, *Le Bois d’la Cambre*, with Rachel, Karl, Sabina, Elliot and Arthur. This was one of the highlights to which my mother took me. It gave me much pleasure that Rachel and I could bring one of our sons here, Karl, and that he at the same time brought his own wife and children. It was good to see them enjoy being there, in my *Bois d’La Cambre*, after all, I had claimed it long before they ever came to Bruxelles. We either visited with the cousins, feasted with them, or we went to *Le Bois d’La Cambre*. Oh yes, we also went to Bruxelles’ magnificent Dinosaur Museum; it was necessary; Elliot was then an avid 5 year-old dinosaur scholar. It was a glorious visit, our visit to Bruxelles; a victory over the odious Nazis who tried to remove me from it. It was also a balm after our visit to Rivesaltes. There I was able to go. But there are places I have not yet been able to visit.

Things I Should Do, I Have Not Done

No one has told me I should, I have to visit Auschwitz, I have to pay homage, or who knows what. I have not yet returned to Lodz, to Poland. I feel remiss. I was born there; my family of origin comes from Lodz. But, at least to date, I have done neither. I have and do love to return to Bruxelles; I have done so a number of times. Bruxelles,

not Lodz, is the city of my childhood; Bruxelles is my hometown. Memory to the first four years of life is not accessible to most of us; it is not to me; and Lodz is essentially an unknown; it does not have the draw that Bruxelles has. It was not difficult for me to return to St.Raphael-Boulouris, I had done it in 1953 and 1997; these had represented asylum from Rivesaltes. My return to Rivesaltes had taken much longer. There are other places I feel I should see, I feel I need to see, but I have not yet gone to Auschwitz. I have not gone to Lodz, to Poland altogether. I have not been able to undertake that challenge. It is not clear to me why.

Over the years I have been preoccupied with the Holocaust. It has featured only too prominently in my immediate family. It has affected my wife and my sons. It has stood out on holidays; it has cast a baseline ambiance in our home, not one of depression, but one of awareness, an omnipresence, even when all is well. And for much of our life as a family, very much has been well. It featured in my two psychoanalyses. It features in my endless self-analysis—a psychoanalyst's way of being. I have read and even studied, underlined, some books on the Holocaust. I have watched many movies about the Holocaust, documentary and fiction. But some things integral to it, I have not done, I have not pushed to do.

I Have Not Yet Been Able to Visit Auschwitz

That I have not yet visited Auschwitz softly troubles me. I have not yet visited my mother's grave. The thoughts pass through my mind, "Did she go to the right? To the left? Did she die in a gas chamber? She was a healthy woman when I left her; she had always been healthy. Did she go to the labor camp next door? Although I know she was sent to Auschwitz, the records that informed Serge Klarsfeld said so. But what

happened there? I am not certain. I have all along assumed that, had she survived, I would have known, at least by 1953. She would have returned to Bruxelles, and she would have inquired with the OSE of my whereabouts. My inquiries with the Jewish Social Service in Pittsburgh always came up with no news, which meant, bad news. Savic's mother survived Rivesaltes and got in touch with Savic. My mother could not read or write, but she was very resourceful. I would have heard. But on the question just exactly what happened to her, I do not have a definitive yes or no.

Has that been my motive for not going there, that I do not want closure on the question? I have let my doctors know that I want to know; I want to know what illness I have, what vulnerability I have; and if I get cancer, I will want to know then and there. So too if anything life-threatening befalls my wife or any of my sons or anyone in their families, I want to know, now. But on this, on just what ultimately happened to my mother, I shudder. Maybe I don't want to know. Would I find the answer in Auschwitz?

I have read about Auschwitz; who hasn't? I have seen movies, documentary, fiction. I see so often, in my mind, the train going through the brick building-gates bridged by the arched rod-iron piece, "*Arbeit Macht Frei*" (Work Makes Free). How many times have I seen the piles of shoes, eye-glasses, bodies strewn about and in mass pits. These things I have done, and do, again and again. But I have not gone there. Had she died in the normal course of life, I absolutely would want to know, not just "cancer", what kind of cancer, where did they find metastases, I would want to know. Even if she had been shot by a robber, or by a stray bullet on Broad Street, I would want to know the details. But this was no death what happened to her. It was a massacre, evil-in-pure-form. I might find it unbearable.

Another factor, a large one though I know it is not the principal one, is that I do not want to further burden my wife with yet more of the Holocaust. She has lived with it for 47 years now; I know that for her too, it is omnipresent. And for her too, it is unbearable. She finds the Holocaust movies unbearable but she goes with me, I sometimes wonder if it's to make sure that I'll be all right. One time, years ago, when we saw the first movie about Anne Frank, we had to leave because Rachel was on the point of fainting. She tells me that I go to these showings readied with defenses to tolerate it. She is fifty percent right; the other fifty percent is that I have to see these things; they help me work it all through. There is evidence that I have not yet "worked it all through." Sometimes, I don't go to a Holocaust movie I would like to see, because I don't want to impose yet another one on Rachel. It is not a matter of my going alone; if I did that, she would feel guilty about not going with me. We both get it from all sides.

I think that as a result my trepidation about absolute knowledge on the fate of my family, my confounded religious dilemma, my incomprehensible mix of living it and staring at it, and my avoidance of so much of it still, my sons are somewhat in limbo about it all. I am grateful that my Holocaust experience is not the only thing I have given them; heh, they got half of their gorgeous genes from me. They know that I am devoted to them; that in my eyes they are themselves, in charge of their own life trajectory and fate. And their mother has given them endlessly of the best she has, which is a great deal; of course a bit of her headaches too. And they have much they have gotten on their own. They are very bright, very well accomplished, very self-determined guys. I am not certain whether I do, or I do not want them to visit Auschwitz. Here, as in other matters, I don't know what they should do. And I approve

of whatever they want to do on this matter. (There's little they have done that I do not approve of.)

I Have Not Yet Returned to Lodz.

Whether or not to return to where I was born, this too is a morass of feelings. I know too little about Lodz. As a child I am fairly certain I spoke some Polish, though Yiddish was our home language. I have facility in languages so I assume I picked up some Polish. Today, shamefully, I remember nearly none. I know that my Bruxelles family, my mother, my aunts, uncles, some of my older cousins, all originally from Lodz, never conveyed to me the greatness, or loveliness, or anything, of Lodz, or of Poland. I heard very little talk about the good old days in Lodz. I got the clear impression that life in Bruxelles was much better than back home. Given the industrious people they were, it was not sheer poverty that made them leave Lodz. I suspect it was the way Jews were treated, even in cities where Jews were doing pretty well and contributing to local survival. When from time to time I asked my mother about it, usually questions about my father and my brother, my mother was not her usual smiling, engaging self. It seemed a chore to answer my few questions on the subject. She was not forthcoming. I was not intrigued or enchanted with what she told me of Poland, or of my father for that matter. I estimate that she came to Bruxelles when she was about 30, when I was about 4. Exactly why she left, I never had the chance to learn; I was too young to know to ask more than I did.

Even though my emotional attachments are in Bruxelles, that Lodz is where I was born makes it a place I would someday like to see. My saying this might be found amusing. I am now 74, by choice still fully self employed, in fact with a very busy

schedule, and the time we have for vacation is distributed between the family getting together during part of August, visiting Rachel's brother and his wife, and just leisurely doing things that need to get done. A lecture trip or a rare festive occasion as Gregory's wedding takes us to Europe; sometimes I go alone. Besides Rachel has her own work and she is highly committed to it. Though I am not on the point of retiring, given the enormous gratification I derive from my work, traveling time is at a premium. This has contributed to our not yet having gone to Poland. I have a standing invitation to Bucharest, but not to Warsaw.

I Am Currently Searching the Whereabouts of My Father and My Brother

But our not having gone to Poland is in part at least due to the anxiety I have attached to Lodz, to Poland, to Auschwitz. The anxiety comes from my question, "What happened to my father and my brother, and my large family for that matter. At the urging of our oldest son Erik, I am currently making efforts to find out what happened to my father and my brother. Erik, is our broader family searcher. His search for lost family members, especially though not exclusively my father and brother, though not a major project of his, seems to bubble up every now and then. Recently, while at a meeting in Halifax—Erik, an Associate at a Bioethics Tank, The Hastings Center in New York State, travels and lectures quite frequently—met a man with whom, for reasons not made clear to me, he found that this Bennett G. knew a source that might help me with searching out my father and brother. Shirley F., a very receptive, dedicated, and very knowledgeable Lodz researcher, child of Lodz Holocaust survivor parents, has already been enormously helpful in getting this search started. My read on it is that, once Erik saw that I was getting into the writing of my Holocaust

witnessing, it stirred his ever-present interest in helping me find out just what happened to my family, his family, and this led to his ferreting out Shirley F., a source of information dedicated to helping survivors and their children reconstruct their lost families, their lost family tree. Again, one of our sons helped me in my at times dormant efforts to pull my family of origin back together. I know they not only want to help me but also they need to reconstruct as best as they can, as best as we all can, where they came from on the side of their father. Again, our sons' efforts may bring success in my feeling-burdened efforts to search out whomever I could of my old family. The search for my father, my brother, and perhaps more, is on now.

Why Have I Not Joined Holocaust Survivor groups.

Why? Why have I not joined local Holocaust survivor groups, or national gatherings of Survivors, of Hidden Children's groups? I'm eligible for all of them; I was given the right to belong to them; I do in spirit, and in other ways, belong to them. This is just as unclear as the other "Whys", "Why has it taken me so long to search out my family's fate?" "Why have I not gone to Auschwitz?" Why? Why!

Is it because it's too much to see others weep, curse and rage, for the same reason as I do? Isn't there solace in sharing, even if it is in sharing misery? I feel kinship with Survivors, with children of Survivors. But I tend to do so more one on one; I don't feel intimately connected in a group, connected, yes, but not in intimacy. It is not that I don't value being in a group; I do; I value being in a group to commemorate, to celebrate, to join voices, on joyful occasions and mournful ones. And I value belonging to a group, to a group of Americans, of Jews, a group of Psychiatrists, Psychoanalysts, Belgians, French-speakers, and when I'm overseas, to a group of

English-speakers. All kinds of groups. But these belongings-to do not automatically make me want to tell my story. I note that I am contradicting myself. I value being in a group to commemorate I said, but I don't go to annual or otherwise-timed commemorations. I admit readily that, while I don't like doing so, I can live with contradicting myself, especially on this subject, a subject to which the answers I have don't fully satisfy me. My answers just move in a direction, but they don't take me to the end of my inquiry. Simply put, other than for my attending meetings of Academic Institutions of which I am a part, and meetings of some of the professional groups to which I belong—a need arising from my work, driven by my participating in one program or another—I don't attend meetings of groups. I am not phobic, I am not antisocial; in fact, I like people in the aggregate. I tend to prefer one on one engagements, family gatherings, small gatherings.

I think that mostly, I don't want to just tell my story to someone with whom I have not in one way or another, by virtue of just everyday happenings, come to feel a place, a moment in intimacy, that makes me want to tell. I need a fertile moment for it; often one that comes after some time together under conditions I have not really identified, but that I know yield intimacy. There is something very private about this sort of telling; it's universally known, but somehow for me, and I think for most Survivors, it's not for the telling anytime, anywhere. Maybe that's why it has taken Survivors so long to talk about what happened to them. Maybe that's why the wise among us have needed to emphasize, you must bear witness.

CHAPTER 9

Why Has it Taken Me So Long to Write My Witnessing?

I still try to understand this to its bottom layers. After years of analysis, personal psychoanalysis and self-analysis, a never-ending process, I am not sure that I can answer this fully or even well. I am dismayed at my own broadly felt reaction of avoidance, of forgetting, of putting aside my responsibility “to bear witness” in this manner. I knew I would get to it, I knew I had to get to it. But, I have delayed until now, a “full” account of what I saw and experienced—it is not a “full” account; the details of a full account would take more time than I have left. In terms of directly writing about it for other than family and friends to see, I first did so in 1999 when I responded to a request that I give a Plenary address on “Some effects of the Holocaust on development”. I was asked, were I so willing, to personalize my views of the topic. And I did. I remember that I had mixed feelings about doing this. Perhaps it was that I was now 70, that I now had to give precedence to my obligation and my wish to write about it.

The Doctor As Burden to His Patients

One conscious factor has conspired with my efforts to contain the reverberations of my past misery by being silent. I have reasoned and really feel, and still do feel, that I have not wanted my patients to know more about me than they might learn in the course of our work together. Patients learn much about their analyst or other therapist, be it psychotherapist or an internist or surgeon. They learn how we interact with people, whether we are pleasant or unpleasant, considerate or inconsiderate, sensitive or

rash, dismissive or accepting, whether we are grim or congenial; they find out many of our quirks and our vulnerabilities. Patients come to know much about their healers, whether they are good healers or hurtful “healers”—i.e. supposed healers. We therapists cannot keep such knowledge from them. Yes, there are many things our patients cannot know about us simply from our behavior. For instance, they cannot know our histories and past and current life situations. Adding to this, those persons I analyze who are clinicians-in-training, would learn about me not only in their analyses but also in the course of running into one another in our Psychoanalytic Institute, or hearing me speak at meetings, local and elsewhere. A large factor operative in my public silence—it is truly an honest factor, a factor I hold to—is that I have not wanted my patients to have to deal with the fact that their analyst is a Holocaust survivor. Here is why.

I firmly believe that the unique relationship the patient develops toward any therapist, especially so during the extensive course of a clinical psychoanalysis, “the transference”—that unavoidable phenomenon essential for the therapeutic effectiveness of a clinical psychoanalysis—that after treatment, this transference, can never be fully metabolized and dissipated. There are good reasons for this. The goals of a clinical analysis are to help the patient come to know himself or herself more honestly, fully, better, to reduce internal conflicts that create all kinds of disturbing symptoms, and to learn to cope better with whatever life dishes out to the patient. Where an analysis works well, though we do not attain ideal outcomes, the patient is enriched, relieved of painful and handicapping symptoms, better able to adapt to life. But there is a price the patient pays resulting from a clinical analysis, beyond the large cost in time and money it takes. It is that the patient continues to experience unresolved elements of the

transference relationship. The experiences in this transference relationship have effects on the patient's psyche that confluence with effects brought about by the past relationships the patient has experienced in life. This happens by virtue of the fact that in the course of treatment, the patient relives in interaction with the therapist, crucial internalized past experiences. As these are repeatedly externalized into the analytic setting, the patient experiences these in the here and now and is helped to review what was past experienced. As the analyst reacts to and adds to the patient's review of that past experience by interpreting what is re-experienced and reviewed, the effects of these interactions then become internalized by the patient. What is internalized now modifies what was internalized before. In this, what is internalized currently includes how the analyst reacted and what and how he or she interpreted. Progressively, the patient's experience in analyzing achieves continuity and this stabilizes what is re-internalized. The basic individual remains the same; but the old long-established patterns of reacting, experiencing, and coping become revised and in essence replaced. Just as all relationships and experiences we have more or less leave their mark on us, so too, the relationship with the analyst remains with the patient, side by side with all that came before, the modifications in what came before notwithstanding. This is what makes the responsibility of being a psychotherapist so large. Thus when the patient has concluded a clinical analysis, elements of the transference remain. This means that while the patient may have gained much from the treatment, the patient is also burdened by what remains of her or his individual transference.

Patients come to us because they have problems of their own with which they want us to help them; they do not need to load on their analyst's life burdens. This is why the analyst's own life burdens, and we all have them, *c'est la condition humaine*,

(that's the human condition), and the problems they cause him or her should not be brought into the clinical situation. In my case then, it would have been, among other things, that my patients might be burdened by the fact that I had suffered consequences of the Holocaust. I do not want to push the point too far, but there is an element of the point I am going to make that pertains here. The experience of the patient whose analyst is a Holocaust survivor is not as brutal, not as intense, not as long-term, not as psyche influencing as befalls the children of survivors. First, the patient and the analyst are **not** child and parent. But also, the patient as an adult seeking treatment is beyond the childhood developmental years, those years so crucial to emotional development and the formation of personality. Those early years are the years when the impact of a parent's Holocaust experience would most leave its mark. Also on this point fortunately, in the clinical analysis of children, the transference does not develop as fully as it does in the analysis of adults. This is because the child's relationships with his or her own parents, pre-empts a full development of transference. Thus children are more protected against fully experiencing the analyst as person than are adults. My point simply is that if my patients knew that I am a Holocaust survivor, this might burden their transference. In addition to its giving shape to their transference, this might too strongly interfere with the patient's externalizing onto me, as is needed, that patient's own internal representations of relationship experiencing with those vitally important to him or her in the past. For example, a patient feels guilty at hating the mother or father the patient also loves. This is one of the most common internal conflicts humans experience, everywhere, in America, in Europe, in Asia, everywhere. In the analysis, triggered by an element of a current event, or a dream, or fantasies, in resonance with this element, arising from the internalized hate the patient feels toward

his or her mother or father of old, the patient now externalizes this hate onto me. If the patient knows that I am a Holocaust survivor, it may contaminate how the patient experiences me; in some it might intensify guilt due to the hate felt toward me beyond what is internalized toward the parent; in another, it might intensify the patient's sadism beyond what is internalized. Thus due to its possible interference in treatment and that the transference does not fully resolve, I have felt it best to not burden my patients with my Holocaust past. Enough that my wife and my children are burdened by it. But I assume that this is just one of the factors that have delayed my getting to this writing.

My Resistance to Writing My Witness Report

My own struggle to cope with what happened to me is the largest factor. As I said, I have been preoccupied with the Holocaust. It's in me; it's part of me. It became part of Rachel, of Erik, Karl, and Josh; it is; it has been the miserable part of our life. It is a constant in our home, we are all aware of it, everyday; the awareness is heightened during Jewish Holidays; but it is omnipresent, even when all is well. I have analyzed and re-analyzed, and it goes on. I have read and studied books on the Holocaust. I have watched movies of all kinds about the Holocaust. So why have I not written about it till now?

I have talked to close friends about it. When I have felt a warm connection with particular friends I have not known so well, I have talked about it; invariably, they tell me they "didn't know". How would they; I have infrequently talked about it. Many of my professional colleagues do not know that I am a child survivor. I did not talk about it in an open public setting, until recently. I always feel a kinship with other Holocaust survivors or with their grown children. I feel most protective of my own sons, children

of a father survivor. But I also feel protective of other children of survivors; I want to put my arm around their shoulders, or hug them, and help them in whatever way I can. I find that they in turn feel a kinship toward me, some want to help me; I see it in their attitude toward me. It has taken me a long time to go public with my personal story. I first did so in Washington DC, very appropriate, I think; the capital of the country that gave me asylum for life. When I read my address to the College of American Psychoanalysts in May 1999, I did my usual, at times tedious, nit-picking, but confident presentation of my understanding of this or that question psychoanalytic, especially developmental or clinical. In this case it was what trauma of this magnitude, specifically the Holocaust, can do to a young human being's emotional development. I wanted to address it especially because it is not as simple I feel as some of my very good colleagues have written. I will not present my thoughts and conceptualization of this matter here; it is not my point to do so. Here what I want to say that I proceeded with my presentation, I think with due trepidation—nobody knows enough about anything pertaining to the human psyche and psychic development—I was, nonetheless, on my usual roll. I like performance; I have experience; I was a professional singer before I went into medicine. All was going smoothly; until I came to the section about how it had affected my development, not that I know all there is to know about that. I said three words, “I was 11 . . .”. I choked up with tears. I could not hold them back. I stopped. Turned away from the lectern. I was totally surprised; I had not anticipated this possibility. I swallowed my tears, pulled myself together, and turned back to face my colleagues. I knew my audience was friendly, so many of them were my friends; and Rachel was there in the front row, her eyes glistening as she had welled up with tears. The audience was very patient; no one left; I later found them, those who spoke

to me, touched and warmly appreciative. I was washed out; but I liked that I had talked about it, in public.

As I said, I do feel some dismay at my delay in getting to my responsibility “to bear witness” by writing about what happened to me. Why my avoidance?

Maybe, some of our wise minds have thought, without admonition, our Survivors will not tell what they went through, and then, who will believe it happened. The fact is that, yes, it was unbelievable what happened. Civilized human beings wouldn’t believe it; after all we are not depraved beasts.

Wise Primo Levi felt he had to threaten:

“Repeat them to your children,
Or may your house fall apart,
May illness impede you,
May your children turn their faces from you.”

It not indifference that has made us silent so long. It is true that we tend to forget the painful past, that we tend to avoid remembering pain. Especially the dreadful past. It’s normal for us to protect ourselves against feeling too much pain. It’s a biologically programmed reaction; all living organisms have such a biological self-protective system. Otherwise, we could just die from the pain. Among other things intense pain can do like just sink our immune system, trigger the production and discharge into our blood stream of powerful emergency triggered hormones, pain, if intense enough, can just lead to physiological shock, which of itself can kill you. In physiological shock your blood pressure drops suddenly and before your body reacts to bring it back up you’re dead from insufficient oxygen to all parts of your complex organ systems. It’s more complicated than this, but this suffices to make the point that we

don't just forget because we are stupid or lazy; we do it to survive. So our wise men are right; we have to bear witness, or it will disappear.

Of course, it is very painful to think of what happened, to dwell on it in order to be able to sort it all out, analyze "it" and my reactions to "it", and re-analyze ad infinitum. Has guilt played a part? That odd beast, "survivor guilt", that I am the only one among the four of us—my mother, my father, my brother Emanuel, and I—who got out? As I said before, for all I know to date, I am the only one of us who got out; I do not have definite proof that it is so. I don't feel guilt. There is something vaguely close to luck or fate, or something. "There but for the grace of god go I." That thing, but without the "god" part. At least not "god" like most people think of. More like Spinoza suggested, "God is in everything", not man-like or woman-like with wills and wishes, threats, remonstrations, and vengeance, demanding placation, atonement, and sacrifice. Anyway.

Is there shame that gives rise to my dismay, shame at my not being more brave? More brave at what? Brave at talking about something very, very painful. And side by side with it, I am not happy at my forgetting the date when my mother was sent to Auschwitz, at my avoiding finding out sooner than I did what happened to her, how, when, where—I know why: she was a Jew. And I am equally not happy at my not having made efforts, until now, to find out the whereabouts of my father and my brother, the probable ends they met—an assumption I have long held because they were in Lodz in September 1939, when the Germans' Blitzkrieg ravaged Poland. And I have not gone to visit, to rage and mourn in Auschwitz. Just thinking about it—I have to put my head down and weep without tears. I have not done these things. I have not done these things that so many others have. I know I have committed myself to doing other

things in dealing with my Holocaust experience. I have committed myself to prevention in my field, prevention in mental health; to the prevention of emotional problems in children that come from the home life experiences they have, and to the prevention of violence and malignant prejudice. This is not an excuse; I have not been able to put myself to the task of finding out, as I no doubt could, as I have started to do now, what happened to those most important to me in my growing up years. I have as if in compensation directed my efforts and energies to the prevention of violence and malignant prejudice.

Also not an excuse, a fact, I have not gone to see Auschwitz not just due to my avoidance. It was enough to ask my wife to come with me to visit Rivesaltes in 1997. If I had suggested I go alone to spare her suffering it with me, which she does, she would have insisted on going too. And then, what of our sons. They would have pushed to come as well. It is not that I want them to forget about the Holocaust; I do not, and I know they never will. My reasoning is not altogether clear on this. At least not to me. Maybe those who read this may have an opinion. That's OK with me. I only know pieces of the answer. It is not due to them alone that I have not gone to see the gas and crematoria burial grounds. It's mostly due to my sick feeling when I think of it—sick feeling of rage and despair.

I ask myself, as I have so many times: What was, what is so awful about what happened to me, to so many of us? I lost my first family, my family of origin, and that is awful. I feel rage about that, especially because of the way and the reason I lost them, my mother, my father, and my brother; I have felt despair about that for years. That despair can never fully dissipate. It lies deep inside, side by side with pain and silent rage. But fortunately, the years have mitigated the despair; the pain too. Not just

the years; it's mostly the family Rachel and I created together that brought about much of this despair and pain mitigation. I have a marvelous—what a meager word—family; have had it now for over 40 years. And it enlarged some years ago with daughters-in-law, and then with grandchildren, five of them. My work too has fostered the dissipation of despair, of pain, but I think, especially of my rage.

I lost my living past of origin. I cannot fill in so many of the details of where I came from, before my own mother and father, and with my own mother and father and brother. Yes, I can and will commit time to finding out about my family, my parents and brother, their parents and siblings. I am setting the way to try to do this by means of genealogies available in a number of sources. But, there are so many details of my mother's family, of my father's family I cannot access, anywhere. I mean the details that only my mother could have given me, and only my father. My two older cousins in Bruxelles, the only known family I have, cannot do so either. I cannot access my own early childhood, those early years we remember so little of without stories, photos, and telling and retelling by parents, uncles, aunts, and grandparents. I have very little besides my own memory to inform me. And on many questions, it fails me. Yes, that is pretty bad, but that too is awful; it is sad, and it no doubt contributes to but is not cause for despair and rage.

Nor am I enraged because I was dislocated, and had to go nearly alone to an unknown world at 13, learn a language—finding it oddly puzzling that I could not understand it then and there, when I landed in New York. Sobering, when, after we both had been in Pittsburgh for some months, my Rivesaltes friend and exodus companion Savic said, “shuddup” to one of our peers, and I, thinking I knew better, said to him, “*Savic, on dit pas ‘shuddup’, on dit ‘shurrrup’*” (one does not say ‘shuddup’,

one says ‘shurrup’). To which our new friend Laverne said gently, “No, Henri, one can say ‘shuddup’”—and was kind enough not to add, one does not say ‘shurrup’. She could have said many things to put me in my place. That, for my trying in our first year in American to speak American English properly! No, it was not that I had to learn a language from the start that filled me with rage and despair. In fact, by my speech, few people pick up the fact that English is not my mother tongue.

I’m not sure that I can put what feels so awful about it all clearly enough. What feels, was, and is so awful is the meaning of what happened: that we have been targeted for extermination by other human beings just because we are Jews. Many have said this, many times, Jews and non-Jews. These words just don’t say enough. Some have tried to say it in music. Poets have no doubt said it better. I can’t compose and I’m not a poet. Maybe if I just break it down and put space around the phrases it will come out louder or something.

How dare anyone,
 whoever,
 decide to exterminate my mother,
 my father, my brother, myself, and many others like us?
 How is that possible?
 What is that?

That’s what enrages me;
 that’s what makes me want to exterminate right back
 —just putting this into words makes me scratch my back, overtaken by eczema for the first time in my life!

It’s unbearable pain that leads to hopelessness—

in someone who is not hopeless,
who has never yet, and never will be hopeless.
And will never exterminate anyone.

I think this more than the other things has kept me silent. I cannot tell what really happened. I don't have the words.

And this too is what has kept me from finding out all there is to know about what happened to my mother, my father and my brother. There is much love between us, much love I feel for them. All evidence points to the fact that the pain they suffered, the odious end they probably met, or I would have heard from or about them, at least from my mother. Imagining the humiliation and the pain they suffered, what that represents to me, has for years and still does, has been and is sufficiently great that, until now, I have avoided further search for them. No doubt, this painful research in times past had some part in my choosing to become a psychoanalyst, an explorer into individual human pasts, like an archeologist, Freud said. And why my self-analysis is endless.

I am not sure that I have yet answered why it has taken me so long to get to this writing. Be that as it may. I know that in addition to my searches past and present, my ruminations, my rememberings, my private tellings and retellings of what happened over there, my sharings with my family, in addition to a lot of things, my work has given me a pathway for expressing what I have and do experience. And in addition, while I have not gone public with my witnessing till now, I have gone public with that of my work that derives, I think, directly from my Holocaust experience.

**We Have to Find Ways to Live Together—
With Our Sameness and Our Differences**

My work too has fostered the mitigation of despair, of pain, but I think, especially of my rage. Not my teaching. To some degree, my clinical work with adults and children has. Knowing that I am doing all I can to help lessen the suffering of others is deeply meaningful to me, I could say it gratifies my wish, my hope to be a healer. Foremost though, I think that of my work that most mitigates my past misery, are my efforts at prevention in mental health, the prevention of violence and malignant prejudice. I am among those psychiatrists who believe that the prevention of violence and malignant prejudice can most be effected by preventing the development of experience derived emotional disorders in children. Without a dissertation on the psychological explanations behind this line of thought, minimizing experience derived emotional disorders in children can be effected by optimizing the parenting they get. This prevention part of my work did not develop by design. Unconscious forces within me drove me to it. My research team set out to study whether qualitative factors, qualitative characteristics of the mother-child relationship correlated with the competence of the child's developing skills in coping with demands of everyday life. Do children's coping skills have anything to do with how they are reared? This question may sound naïve today, but it was not 4 decades ago. So we set out to observe twice weekly, ten mothers and their newborns; and we observed them for 7 years. Fine; we had developed an elegant set of measures whereby we could get some assessment of what we needed to observe and evaluate. The best plans of mice and men, it is said, go afoul. Well, we didn't altogether go afoul. We just got derailed. As we started to collect our observational data (evidence), I began to be drawn to these very young

children's aggressive behaviors. "How in the world do humans become aggressive?" lit up surrounded by light bulbs, in my head. But that's not what we were after. We were looking at adaptation in kids. But something within me drove me to keep looking at their aggression, little kids, even less than one year old! Aggressive? Yes.

It did not take too many years after for me to realize that what so fascinated me about the development of aggression in humans had something to do with my experience at the hands of humans whose aggression had taken its ugliest form, the destruction of others because of their religion, or skin color, or ethnic difference. This work, driven by my experience in the Holocaust, led me and my colleagues, who were remarkably congenial to the direction we were taking, led us into prevention work in mental health. It resulted in our developing materials targeting parents and future parents for optimizing their child rearing and therewith, optimize their children's emotional development. This carries with it efforts toward the prevention of violence and malignant prejudice. My colleagues and I are committed to this goal. I know that the direction my work took was not accidental; pretty clever of my unconscious mind to lead me there. I wasn't smart enough to do it when fully awake.

At times I have avoided looking directly into the gullet of my past. It is not a pastime or a sport. I have too long delayed getting to my bearing witness. But I am here now. I remember my past, I want to remember it, and I want to remind others of it, hoping they will not let it happen again, nor wish to perpetrate it again. I know some think I'm a dreamer, an idealist. I believe it is possible. If it is not, we can at least as little of it as we might. And I have committed my life to that end. Happily, in this I am not alone.

After 60 years, I come out of my Holocaust misery with the strong conviction that we will not eliminate differences; that we have to learn to live tolerantly enough with our differences. My solution, no doubt one among other efforts toward that end, has been to try to prevent the development of malignant prejudice. I have talked and written about this within the Mental Health Community. What I have said in that community can be said everywhere.

Ruminations on Reading Primo Levi

In some part, I am encouraged and pressed to write “my story” by Primo Levi. Primo Levi was, as Italo Calvino the much-appreciated writer said, “One of the most important and gifted writers of our time”. Few write like he did. I have written like Physicians in my field write, clinical study and direct observational developmental research, the kind of writing psychoanalytic types write. Even apart from the subject, this writing is not my comfort type writing. I am pushed from within to write what happened to us, to me, my mother, those around me. But as I said at the start of this witness report, I am also pushed by Levi’s poem “If this is a man . . .” It is an admonition well known to Survivors, that we must tell the things that happened to us, and that we are to “Repeat them to our children”, if we do not, Levi’s curse weighs heavy, “Or . . . may your children turn their faces from you.” A painful threat. But he is right.

I have long intended “to bear witness”; for many years now. Levi should have been a little more sympathetic. After reading him, who will dare write? Many brilliant writers have crowned him. He deserves it. In his writings I have again and again been struck by his humor, a touch cynical, but striking humor. How can we write about what we went through and keep a straight face and not crash into tears! The telling has to be humored, rightly. He did that.

For me, reading *Survival in Auschwitz (If This Is a Man)* was, is unbearable. Levi narrative is stark, moves quickly. Unbelievable. Except, we know it happened. Like he wrote it. Other readings, like of *La Treve* was easy—(I read *La Tregua*, in French translation; I have not been able to find an English translation of this work for

Rachel; *Moments of Reprieve*, is not the same book). In *La Treve*, Levi traces his year-long journey back to Italy after the Russians liberated Auschwitz 24 January 1945; it took him a year to get from Auschwitz back to Turin. Levi's remarkably measured humor made it easy. *Survival in Auschwitz* is painfully, dreadfully simple, to the point. His humor—clearly part of the man—makes what he tells us bearable, riveting, and engages us.

Rivesaltes cannot compare with Auschwitz, and certainly not with Birkenau. We were not threatened with man-caused death, the ugliest form of death. Side by side with it, heart attacks, strokes, cancer, are good deaths. We were not, as Levi says, dead by a yes or a no. We starved, yes. Lived in barracks, “huts” he says. We kids were not made to work, in fact, we did nothing except fill the time. We filled the time by playing games, or a few times, in the evening, we danced to our own singing. Like in *La Treve* we suffered from idleness. Like no doubt in all the camps, we too got sick. Hygiene, sanitation, conspired with starvation and the Nazis to do us in. A number died of illness and starvation. But we did not have to answer with a “Yawohl”, or be bludgeoned. We were not stripped of the few clothes we brought with us; we could wear them. We did not have to show ourselves in prisoncamp uniform. It was cold in the winter but we did not have to stand out in the rain or snow and slave at some crushing menial labor.

Reading *Survival in Auschwitz* was, is, hard, awful! I could only read it one chapter at a time, in limited doses. I believe as he did about the “Drowned and the Saved”. If I understand him, I accept it. But there is one point he makes that especially touches on one of my efforts at explanation about surviving or not, the things that happened to us. As I read it, Levi is commenting on the survival of the fittest in Auschwitz. I want to amplify on what he said of it, on what made for surviving or not

surviving there, and probably has much to do with survival anywhere. I take his cryptic phrase, “the drowned and the saved”, to be a cynical reduction of what he probably thought of it all. What matters to me is that in this phrase Levi touches on the critical matter of having been exterminated by or having survived those 1940-1945 atrocities. I want to add a few notes on this question that grow out of what has been said about it by Mental Health professionals who have given much thought to the issue, though, I think, not sufficient to close the discussion. I bring this issue into this frame because it is of interest not just to any one field, but because we need to talk to one another across fields about it.

What made for our surviving or not surviving in the camps? Most of us accept what Darwin proposed about the survival of the fittest. But we all know that there is more. It is not just genes, not just what we inherit. I should note that Darwin, as best as I understand, did not specify that the survival of the fittest derived only from our genes or just what we inherited. For those more scholarly than I on just what Darwin said, I ask, give me some leeway. It is genes and what we inherit, but it is also what we experienced before we got to the concentration camps. Coming to the issue as a Psychiatrist-Psychoanalyst, what we experienced before we got there enters into what made for “the survival of the fittest.” Darwin gave us a *sine qua non* start. Lamarck brought “experience” into Darwin’s baseline explanation.

This question became important to me years ago when some of my very capable colleagues made what I felt were too sweeping generalizations about the traumatizing outcome of being a Holocaust survivor. Perhaps oversimplifying what they proposed, I found the proposed universalization of the traumatic effects of having lived through the Holocaust to be too simple and consequently in some cases inapplicable. What most

raised my doubt about the hypotheses put forward was an over-pathologizing and over-generalizing that all Holocaust survivors suffered severe emotional disorders. The blanket assumption that surviving the Holocaust left one seriously emotionally crippled proved inapplicable to Survivors I have known. I have heard the explanation though, that the reason such pathologizing occurred was in the service of insuring that the Germans would be compelled to pay reparations to Holocaust Survivors. I am skeptical that this was the reason, and hope that it was not, or it would represent a manipulation of facts by the Mental Health Community that would be in violation of medical ethics. No doubt, many Survivors suffered serious ill-effects of their traumatizing experiences. But we cannot assume that what is found in a number of Holocaust survivors is necessarily applicable to all Survivors. To abbreviate my comments here, just as any assumption that “the survival of the fittest” is simply the by-product of inheritance is flawed, to assume that being traumatized by the Holocaust yielded the same result in all Survivors is also seriously flawed. Three experiential factors contributed to survival in the camps.

The first is circumstantial chance; Primo Levi defined it well: you survived by a “No” or a “Yes”. Poets have written about that, though they have a very different context in mind than did the Nazis. Franz Schubert put one such poem by Wilhelm Mueller, one that speaks of unrequited love, into one of his over 700 lieder: “*‘Ja’ heisst das eine Woertchen, das and’re heisset ‘Nein’, die beiden Woertchen schliesen die ganze Welt hinein*”¹; yes, the Germans knew that. In Auschwitz whether you got a ‘No’ or a ‘Yes’ depended on circumstances. The first had to do with how you appeared health-wise and how labor-capable you seemed at the time; and the second is how

rushed the Nazis were to get that “final solution” executed. Levi noted his good fortune as he put it, at having

‘ “‘Yes’ is one of those little words, the other is ‘No’, the two little words lock the whole world within them.”

been incarcerated in January 1944, when the German war machine was in serious need of free slave labor, and in need of war materials of all kinds. Healthy, though starved, as my mother was, she passed under “*Arbeit macht Frei*” in August 1942; the Nazis were in full swing, “the final solution” had to be expedited. As a Chemist in 1944, Levi postulates, the Nazis thought he could be usefully employed; let him help us develop chemicals and ersatz rubber needed for our war machine. Add to circumstantial chance the frivolous play of non-circumstantial chance, just plain luck, whatever luck is.

The second experiential variable factor is that not all Holocaust Survivors had the same Holocaust experience. In fact, in addition to studies as the Child Survivors study of Judith Kestenberg and Ira Brenner, as more Survivors have written about what happened to them, the more variable their experiences become evident. The variations in fact are numerous. If we look only at what is meant by Child Survivors, like me, we varied along the entire age spectrum from less-than-one-year-old infancy through late adolescence and all the years between; some of us were 3, some 5, some 16, etc. Some of us were in camps for the duration of the war, some for part of that time. I for instance was in Ricibidou-Rivesaltes for about 9 months. Some Child Survivors were hidden in Christian families, some were hidden in OSE Homes set up exactly for Jewish children without families. I was in camps and in an OSE Home during the two years I lived through that disastrous period. Some of us had the great good fortune of having

parents survive; Savic's mother and brother survived. Some lost parents, siblings, and more. Of course, some generalizations can be made regarding the effects of so traumatizing a period of life. But we must also duly give weight to the fact that Survivors had differing, even unique Holocaust experiences.

Third, even if we were the same age and in the same camp for the same time duration, each of us experienced what happened differently. This third factor is complex. Two major component-factors play a part here. First, the Holocaust experience happened to us at a specified time in our lives. What had been and what was the state of our family relationships at the time? What was the status of our psychological-emotional development at the time? We all have different adaptive strengths and capabilities shaped by our genes and by our prior everyday life experiences. Who we were at the time the Holocaust hit us, must also be taken into account. The second of these component-factors is how we interpreted what was happening to us. Each one of us interprets every single experience we have. We don't usually put it into words, but each of us gives a specific meaning to what happens to us. Who knows, maybe some of us felt enraged at being maltreated and others felt they knew they would get punished some day for having done something unacceptable in the past. My point simply is that it was not just a matter of the survival of the fittest depending on what genes you were born with.

On Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, though I don't go to Shul, over the years I have ritualized thinking, reading, listening to Yiddish songs and Hebraic cantorial music. This year, 2002, I was reading Primo Levi. For me the High Holidays are always times for contemplation, maybe rumination is more to the point. I plodded through Primo Levi; I didn't rush to get out of there fast. I plodded, pausing to indulge

some of my own relatively parallel remembrances, associating to what Levi says, comparing his experiences in the *Buna*, the slave labor camp part of Auschwitz—where he spent a year, 1944, until the Russians liberated them on January 24, 1945—to my experiences in Rivesaltes. In *Survival in Auschwitz* (unfortunately re-titled from the original *If This Is A Man*) Levi touched many consonant chords in me. I know he has similarly affected others. I smile even now at his detailing the food we ate at these for-Jews-only asylums. The odor, he writes, no doubt emanated from them, not from the food, from us. “The odor of turnips and cabbage, raw, cooked, and digested.” I smile because it’s long past. From readings of interned victims telling of the food we got, I get the impression that whether it was turnips, cabbage, artichokes, corn, whatever delicacy-featured menu we got, it seemed to be the same things for months. The camps’ commandants must have gotten trainloads of whichever of these delicacies it was; so that once introduced you could count on getting it for the duration. We didn’t have cabbage in Rivesaltes, not when I was there. Nor artichokes or corn. According to Paul Niederman who told Vivette Samuel (in *Sauver Les Enfants*, pages 188-193), of his incarceration in Rivesaltes, where he came from Gurs perhaps a little after I had escaped on 1 May 1941, during Niederman’s stay, Rivesaltes served a constant diet of artichokes and then of corn. Niederman tells that he and his brother supplemented their diet by pilfering the garbage bins behind the camp kitchen. On reading of Niederman’s brilliant diet supplementation, I regretted not having known about the garbage bins, and shake my head in mild dismay, the kind that comes with smiling, that I didn’t think of that! Niederman by the way, proposes on the basis of their garbage bin expeditions and findings that while we were starving in the barracks, the French camp administrators, guards, etc. ate plenty. Perhaps a little self-righteously, though not without risk, the

Niederman brothers helped themselves to a supplementation of their barracks rations of artichokes and corn. But Primo Levi's delectable telling of the odor of the food we ate, led me to think and I often have long before I read Levi, of the turnips and rutabagas, the hell food that constituted our diet. To this day I never want to see a turnip, and even more so a rutabaga. Just the thought of rutabagas brings with it not only its musty odor but a physiological reaction on the way to regurgitation. I don't know why nature ever made turnip and rutabaga; they are no more than slightly disgusting waterlogged cellulose pulp. I give it to turnips, they have a sliver of taste; but I never want to see the things again. I guess even nature doesn't always succeed. I smile now. But it was no smiling then, being in the constant company, as Levi speaks of it, of "our old comrade hunger". He was a very popular fellow in 1940s Europe, at least among the incarcerated.

Levi tells us that Clauser, his *Buna* co-inhabitant, had carved "*Ne pas chercher à comprendre*" in his eating bowl. "No point trying to understand." "Don't try to understand". "Just go with the flow". Passively tolerate the intolerable, otherwise you'll wrench your gut, shake your head to exhaustion, cry yourself dry, rage to despair. Just keep going, day by day. Many of us did.

Levi writes, "Today, at this very moment as I sit writing at a table, I myself am not convinced that these things really happened". They happened. I am sympathetic to what Primo Levi is saying; I know what he means. I have not felt that. Maybe I have remembered it too much. I think Rachel feels that way sometimes, that I remember it too much. I know that she feels at times that she just can't deal with it now, she can't as I always seem to do. Why should she always think about it? In truth, I don't want her to always think about it; nor do I want my sons to. But maybe Levi just meant at that

moment that it was so bewildering, so difficult to believe, so unreal. The Germans, a civilized people; the French, the Italians, the Hungarians, civilized people. I remember it, all of it, even if I can't remember many details. It happened, all of it.

But it sends me into a deluge of shrink type ruminations. I just caught a glimpse of a photo of our two youngest grandsons, then 5 year-old Ben and Arthur. They are the best of friends. When we get together, they seek one another out before they look at the rest of us. I have walked behind them, musing as I watch them, two friends, colleagues in some deep discussion about something of large interest; they are not smiling, they philosophize, at 5! In the photo, they have one arm around the other's shoulders. How can kids like these, maybe not exactly like these, but in essence like these, grow into doing to others what the Nazis did to us. Of course it's not just shrinks who ask this. Many who are not Mental Health professionals wonder this too. Primo Levi the Chemist, Novelist, Poet wondered this, and wrote about it better than nearly everyone. Those Nazis once were little kids. In Mental Health, but also in Sociology, many among us, leaning on accepted studies, have become convinced that delinquents, criminals, for the most part were children who experienced serious maltreatment, abuses, at the hands of their own parents, within their own homes. We have found that they have been reared by parents who have been very troubled persons, and who in turn, became troubled in their growing years by being reared by very troubled parents. Yes, other factors may play a part too, such as traumas that are not perpetrated by their own parents; but these traumas are much less likely to produce criminality. The alternative genetic assumption of a "bad seed" child leaves me very skeptical. As a Child Psychiatrist and Psychoanalyst, I have never seen such a child. Nor so far as I know, have any of the Child Psychiatry, Psychology or Social Work colleagues in my

community. Admittedly not lyrical, it is not poetry that, “maltreatment begets maltreatment”, it’s fact.

Relevant to a degree here is Primo Levi’s contemplation of “the Jewish Prominents”, those in the camps who became selected to serve as lieutenants of the Nazi camp administrators. We have all heard that some of these “Jewish Prominents” were notably brutal to their own Jewish charges. Levi explains their behavior on the basis of these Prominents “displacing” their own pain-generated-rage and hate away from their own torturers and onto their Jewish brethren. He is right. But I want to note another prominent defense mechanism here at play, “identification with the aggressor”; and we should also note the play here of some of these Prominents own pre-existing trauma-derived sadism. In our own research on the development of aggression from birth on we found exactly what Levi said: pressed from within and unable to contain the hostility they feel toward their own mothers, the most common earliest adaptive strategy, defense mechanism, young children use is to “displace” this hostility onto others. It is just too anxiety producing for young children to discharge the hostility they feel that is instigated by their own mothers’ mal-ministrations directly onto their mothers. They begin to mediate their hostility discharge by means of its displacement onto others or outright inhibition. Like the infant who raises his arm to strike his mother and stops his arm mid-air, interrupting the trajectory reactively initiated by the pain he is experiencing. But in addition to displacement and inhibition of hostility, we soon also came to see evidence of “doing to another something that was done to you,” an adaptive strategy that borrows the well-known defense mechanism, identification. When identification is linked to experiencing maltreatment by a parent, this identification is set to function only in specific circumstances, it becomes an

identification with the hostile-hurtful parent, thus an “identification with the aggressor”. Anna Freud who proposed this mechanism in the early 1930s pointed out that this mechanism is born out of the experience of feeling helpless in the face of dread. A little girl told her that she is no longer afraid of ghosts. When Anna Freud asked her how she came to this, the little girl told her something like, “Simple, I pretend to be a ghost, then I’m not afraid of ghosts!” Creativity in children is awesome; to see it evolve is a privilege. The child identifies with the frightening threatening ghost—the ghost itself a projection of the child’s own frightening threatening rage—in order to withstand the fear and pain this ghost, figment of her imagination, causes her. But the child pays the price of not actually letting go of the rage the hurt generates within her or him. Such rage and hate accumulates in her or his psyche. Later, finding an accommodating occasion, the child discharges the rage and hate stored in her or him by such an enactment, by being the one who abuses and terrifies someone other, thereby freeing herself or himself of presently activated fear and rage or of past-experienced but repressed rage and fear. To be sure, the biologically programmed need to survive plays its part too, it does so even when it’s doing so is very sad; better to beat others than to be beaten.

So far as the accumulation of sadism reactive to traumatic experiences that antedated our camp incarcerations, we cannot assume that no Jewish child has ever been reared by troubled parents. Emotionally disturbed Jewish parents unwittingly hurt their own children just as badly as non-Jewish emotionally disturbed parents do. Many Jews, having suffered substantial hurt in the course of development at the hands of their own troubled parents, came to the Holocaust with pre-existing internalized loads of hostility and rage. There is a good possibility that some of the “Jewish Prominents” brought

some of this old baggage with them and found their camp “job” a fitting vehicle for the discharge of their past, repressed miseries.

In some part, I am pushed to write my story by Primo Levi. I am encouraged by his remarkable accounts to take courage and write my account. But I am also pushed by his poetic appeal and admonition that introduces his book on his survival in Auschwitz, initially entitled, *If This Is a Man*. In this poem, which opens the door to his recounting his year in *Buna*—the conveniently located slave labor camp beneficiary of those not sent to be gassed in neighboring Auschwitz—Levi admonished Survivors, to tell what happened to us, to

“Repeat them to your children

Or may your house fall apart,

May illness impede you,

May your children turn their faces from you.”

Many times I have heard it said that we “must bear witness”, we must report, record, what happened to us. I have long intended to do that. Yes, at least twenty or more years now. All, now, more than 60 years after it happened! I am 74 now. All this misery—I could use other words too—happened when I was from 11 to 13 years of age.

I know I have not well-enough explained why it has taken me, and so many of us, so long to tell about it. I, we, can only count on what others may experience as they put themselves in our place; what would you have felt? Could you have drugged up all the painful events, consequences, and re-experienced them remembering as you told about it? Those of us who treat people the way I do, “Psychodynamic clinicians”, Psychoanalytic clinicians especially, know how terribly difficult it is for patients—even when the outcome of this at times torturous treatment can lead to better mental health—

to lend themselves to remember, to talk about, to re-experience even under contained treatment conditions, those experiences, relationships, events, that have caused them inordinate pain and harm. It is not easy to excavate our traumas, to bring them to the light of day and dwell on them, even if it may do us some good.

My story, our story, is that because we were Jews, by those in power, by law, we lost human value. Now we could all be abused, subjected to criminal indignities. But there were differences in the way, to what degree, we were abused by corrupt-law enforcers and subjected to legally sanctioned indignities. Primo Levi was interned in Auschwitz; I was in Rivesaltes. The distance between the two camps was just a two-day train ride with a stop in Drancy. In fact, for 991 Jews interned in Rivesaltes in August 1942, my mother included, their destination was Auschwitz. Between August and October 1942, 2,250 Jewish Rivesaltes inmates were sent to Auschwitz; two adjacent stops on the same railroad line. But it was a dehumanizing voyage from Rivesaltes to Auschwitz. The devaluation gradient was steeper in Auschwitz than it was in Rivesaltes. Rivesaltes was a concentration camp; Auschwitz was an extermination camp. There were no murder-by-gas chambers or dead-Jews-disposing crematory furnaces in Rivesaltes. There was no “Yes”, meaning to the right, “No”, meaning to the left, in Rivesaltes. “Yes” or “No” was *Arbeit macht Frei*’s signature. In addition to this omnipresent dehumanizing life-threat, in Auschwitz one also lived under the threat of suddenly being struck a heavy blow to any part of the body by one or another human degenerate. In Rivesaltes threat to life came naturally, by starvation or by insufficiently treated illness, not by the will of a criminal. Nor were we beaten by some human degenerates. I have at times thought, weren’t the French Nazis just so grateful that the German Nazis had masterminded and were executing “the final

solution”, and that they, the Sun King-descendent French could let the butchering go to *les sales Boches*. After all they would not have been as stupid as *Marie-Antoinette* and said, “Let them breathe gas!”

I paused, sent into thought—when a thought is thought so frequently as I have thought this thought, it approaches rumination—in resonance with Primo Levi’s speaking of “poor brute Alex”, the Kapo of the newly formed Kommando 98. The Chemical Kommando, Levi came to think, was what the Nazis might have especially preserved him for, a chemist destined for the magnesium chloride warehouse where, they hoped, he could help them produce their synthetic rubber, *Buna*, for which the Monowitz *Arbeitslager*, the labor camp near Auschwitz, was named. Of this Kapo “Alex”, who wipes his oil-grease-stained hand on Levi, front and back, Primo Levi says, “on the basis of this action I judge him . . . and others like him, . . . in Auschwitz and everywhere”. What a debased, disgusting act. I too have been compelled into judging others for some actions that just coerce judgment. Actions of those who dehumanize others and treat them like dirt as did and do the Nazis, everywhere, in Germany, France, America, The Middle East, everywhere. And I do so too not just to the actions of anti-Jews, anti-Blacks, but also anti-Americans, anti-Israelis, anti-Germans, anti-Palestinians, etc. How do we do this, become anti-color, anti-religion, anti-ethnicity? I have made effort in my field to bring some understanding to this question. It is one of those questions that need the collaboration of adjacent, overlapping fields, fields dedicated to the study of behavior in all its dimensions.

Very briefly, here is a piece of psychiatric-psychoanalytic thinking that I believe has to go into any explanation of “how we come to be anti-others”, whatever others. Some say that we are born with a fear of strangers, with a “xenophobia”. Some among

those of us who study the development of very young children, in fact, from birth, see no need for such an inborn assumption given that normal human developmental processes can account for the universally found “xenophobia”. Yes, unpleasant as it may be, some degree of xenophobia is universal. It grows out of developmental processes obligatory for the preservation of the species.

The newborn does not come into the world with ready-made relationships. He comes into the world with mechanisms and built-in patterns to form them; but they are not ready-made. And that is part of the problem, the path human infants are genetically programmed to take to establish their attachments brings the potential for xenophobia. The infant forms his earliest attachments by a progressive process. As this process evolves, a critical period occurs, when at 6 months or so of age, the infant experiences two forms of anxiety, which secure his attachment to a specific person, to his mother, to his father. First, he experiences “separation anxiety” when he perceives that his mother, to whom he is attaching, is going to leave him, for whatever reasons is going out of his field of vision, whether it is to go the bathroom or the store, etc. This “separation anxiety” occurs because the 6 month-old, we say, is not yet able to hold a stable representation of the mother in his mind when she is not in his field of vision; he experiences her leaving as if he were losing her. Since the infant that age has not yet developed the ability to measure time, losing her is infinite, forever. This is why infants that age cry when their mothers leave them if even momentarily. This “separation anxiety” reaction is psycho-biologically programmed to secure attachment to a member of the same species, an obligatory condition for the preservation of the species.

To further insure species-specific attachment, a further step in the process reinforces and narrows the target of attachment, that it occur to specific persons. The genetic program further secures this attachment by seeing to it that the infant feels anxious in the presence of persons other than mother, father, etc. Were this not to happen, the infant might attach to just any individual of the same species. Simplifying matters further now, indiscriminate attachment is not desirable because much healthy psychological development depends on specific, essentially non-interchangeable attachments. The stability of communities, of communal life depends on such essential non-interchangeable attachments. This non-interchangeable attachment is secured by the second anxiety, “stranger anxiety”. “Stranger anxiety” is the complement of “separation anxiety”. Whereas “separation anxiety” achieves holding on to the specific mother, “stranger anxiety” turns the child *away* from others, compelling the child’s attachment *to* the mother. It is this “stranger anxiety” that is the early source of xenophobia.

In addition to these essential attachment dynamics, our children become who they are, “our” children, by the normal process of “identification.” All children identify with those who rear them, whatever color, religion, ethnic group; this is how children come to think of who they are. This is what makes a child become a member of a specific community of people, whatever race, religion, ethnicity. Sigmund Freud said it is as if the child bears the stamp, “Made in the Jones Family”, or “. . . in the Ruben Family”, etc.

These obligatory normal developmental factors, the specificity of attachment, stranger anxiety, and identification, make us all prejudiced. But I have proposed that this is a *benign form of prejudice*. I am a member of whatever community I come from,

and I prefer to associate with members of that community. If I have a choice, I am more likely to associate with someone from my community than with someone from my neighboring community. I don't hate my neighbors, I don't dislike them, in fact I may even like them; I just prefer my own, I feel greater comfort and security with them.

What makes for prejudice that is not benign, that brings with it the wish to push my neighbor away, to even want to get rid of my neighbor, comes from the externalization of whatever accumulated hate and rage I carry in my psyche, onto that neighbor. Of course to justify my hate toward that neighbor I will have to distort, misrepresent, vilify, ridicule, what he is in actuality. I will make him into a very dislikable human being, I will vilify, demonize him. I will fabricate a sustainable theory as to why I should dehumanize this undesirable creature and how righteous I am to want to ostracize him, to rid the world of him and his kind. All social groups have their undesirables. All are based on some distortions, over-generalizations, reductionism, substantial falsehood. We all have our *benign prejudices*; no dehumanization or wish to cause harm comes with it. Too many of us experience *malignant prejudice*; the wish to disassociate, dehumanize, ostracize, destroy comes with that. *Malignant prejudice* is sick! To wish to destroy persons because of race, color, religion, ethnicity, is sick!

I can understand being anti-criminal, anti-sadist, anti-those who practice malignant prejudice. I judge them. I want the law to intervene here. I don't vote for the death penalty; but I will accept it in certain cases.

Levi made me aware of something else I found of interest and induced my delving into comparative experience. It is also of interest sufficient to make me pause, perhaps because I labor and play in Psychological Development, especially in fixing it

and in optimizing it. Born in Turin in 1919, Levi was 24-25 when he was in Auschwitz. I was 11-12 when I was in Rivesaltes. Five months into his internment in Auschwitz, Levi wrote, “We preserved the memories of our previous life, but blurred and remote, profoundly sweet and sad, like the memories of infancy”. Contemplation, to contrast with the present, to soothe and calm himself when in quiet deep pain? It is a needed thing, to be able to comfort oneself in times of deep pain. The wider mental latitude of his young adult years made that contemplation possible. In Rivesaltes, I didn’t think of the past, of my previous life as sweet memory. I was 11-12; I thought of now, today. What is happening to me, to my mother, to those around us. I did not think then of the past or of the future. My mother and I didn’t talk about the past. We didn’t talk of the sweet past as Azuchena does in *Il Trovatore* as she and her son are facing death; nor did we talk woefully about what was happening to us. I didn’t think of the past or the future for that matter. Of what I remember today, one of the times I thought of the future was when Mora, in getting me to speak my first words of English, asked me presumably 20 years later, what had become of me, I reflected and told him I was a doctor. In Rivesaltes, I thought of today; I had no thought of the past, and thought no farther than tomorrow. It might have also been a factor in my arguing with my mother that since we had bananas now, on the point of leaving Ricibidou for Rivesaltes, I wanted to eat another one now. She argued for tomorrow; I understood what she said, but I was living for today. It was not for the same reason as Levi. I did not feel like Levi who was in Auschwitz, where the end of time was *Morgen frueh*, tomorrow morning. The threat of death did not hang in the air in Rivesaltes as it did in Auschwitz. I did not think of tomorrow, though I did not doubt that it would come. Perhaps all I could do then was to think of now, today, how to get from morning to evening. My

mother brought up tomorrow. She did so when she told me we were to leave Ricibidou and when she told me she wanted me to leave Rivesaltes, could I do that? She made me think of tomorrow. Maybe it's that things were not so awfully bad in Rivesaltes as they were in Auschwitz that I did not need the solace of past memories. It may have been my age that I didn't think ahead, of tomorrow; not unless it was something good, or it was something bad. But I do think that it may have been the need to put my energies toward survival today that I did not even take time to comfort myself with sweet memories of times past.

The uncertainty I feel on this question is not just the uncertainty that comes with uncertain or vague past memory; it comes from the strains of our life in Rivesaltes. In fact, we suffered from idleness. Levi takes note of the stresses of idleness in *La Treve*, when for one year, they did no work, except at surviving. In Ricibidou we were mostly idle; In Rivesaltes we were nigh totally idle. In other times idleness becomes occasion for reflection on the past, present, and the future. Maybe because he labored in the *Buda*, Primo Levi could in moments of rest, access “. . . the memories of our previous life, but blurred and remote, profoundly sweet and sad, like the memories of infancy”. In Rivesaltes, we kids lived in “the here and now” as Merton Gill said of a different context; we thought of the here and now; we just coped with the here and now. In *Survival in Auschwitz*, Levi felt that “history had stopped. . . . Time, valueless and superfluous material, of which we sought to rid ourselves.” He is right; History had stopped; our old life had stopped; our life after was not predictable, was not foreseeable. Our life had stopped; this was a malignant time-space between our life before and what would come after—fortunately for some of us, it was not fatal, we could rebuild. For Levi, eventually, one year later, he returned to Turin, to his home, to family, and was

able to continue the life he had started before; though no doubt, forever, he was different than before. For me, my life of old stopped, cut off. After became a new life, a different life, far away from home, from family. Once it resumed, my History was very different. A metaphoric equation of it might state that: My history went from A to chaos-dehumanization-starvation-threat to life-loss, to B + re-humanization and loss.

Time too was a problem, Levi said. For him time was “valueless, superfluous”. He is right; life was derailed, time rotted. We could not use that essential element life gives, of which now already for decades, there never seems enough time. For me in Ricibidou-Rivesaltes, time was tedious, idleness did that; and this idleness robbed time of its essence, made it nearly valueless. It was not valueless because I was with my mother. But to be concrete about it, I truly lost time, lost nearly two years of schooling, except for the 6½ months interval of schooling in St.Raphael. I lost school-time in Rivesaltes, and I lost being-with-my-mother-time in St.Raphael. I didn’t know that this was the start of my life without my mother. On top of this time problem, time was also made tedious by the ever-present pain we felt; ever-present pain coming from the misery the Nazis served us; it made time tedious. The pain-constant of misery makes time weigh heavy and drag.

We all know that Levi was, is a poet. So many times reading him I pause. Yes, we all have know, “. . . in moments of quiet full of the distant menacing roar that every European knows, . . .” Lille, Dunkerque. “It’s just thunder”, my dear mother said, hoping I’d believe her. Yes, the thunder of war; and then we had to get off the train to avoid being blown up in it by that thunder. Why bring that sound to a train loaded only with fleeing refugees? The menacing roar of those planes mixed with exploding bombs

they had dropped. This is what I heard in the quiet of waking up the morning of May 10, 1940. Then I didn't know what it was. I found out soon enough.

Reading Levi is going through it again, without being in it. And then there is this precious moment in his narrative. Levi tells us about Lorenzo, an Italian civilian worker, hired and paid by the Germans because he is not a Jew. Pausing in the midst of telling us of the miseries the Nazis inflicted on him, Levi tells us that Lorenzo “brought me a piece of bread and the remainder of his ration everyday for six months; he gave me a vest of his . . . ; he wrote a postcard on my behalf to Italy and brought me the reply. For all this he neither asked nor accepted any reward, because he was good” And Levi goes on, “My case was not the only one. There were others . . . various kinds of civilians . . . [non-Jews paid laborers who provided Haeftlinge] the means to survive. . . . [They were] their civilian ‘protectors’ and ‘friends’”. I pause as so many of my Lorenzos pass through my mind: that stranger on the train to Marseilles, the OSE people, Germaine Masur, Mora, Aranka, those who rescued us from Europe, including The American Quakers, Jewish Social Services, the Wagners, Faye, Harry, the girls, the Steinfirs, Donald, Jane, the kids. They didn't ask for anything from me; they just gave to me, helped me, facilitated my recovery, development, and made my future possible. They were good. One can only thank; I thank them; I have a million times. I am in great debt; but there is no payment, no direct payment to them. My dedication page tells where most of my indebtedness lies.

Of those civilians who worked in *Buda*, Levi wonders how they viewed the Haeftlinge, the slave laboring Jews: “they saw us reduced to ignoble slavery, without hair, without honor and without names, beaten everyday, . . . and they never see in our eyes a light of rebellion, or of peace, or of faith.” These were as he said, the most

ignoble of conditions. The French Nazis could cooperate, eagerly comply, with the needs of the abhorrent German Nazis. But they could not, or at least they did not get to the point of shaving our heads, beating us, and coercing us under threat of extermination to slave for them. When I was there, I don't believe slave labor was enforced in Rivesaltes. That may have changed over time. I recently learned that Rivesaltes internees were at some point subjected to unpaid labor, slave labor. A recent communication from a Holocaust Survivor Organization informed me that I might be eligible to compensation for slave labor practices in Rivesaltes. I had not been aware of this, Rivesaltes at some point introduced and instituted slave labor in Rivesaltes. My escape in May 1941 protected me from both slave labor, which might have affected my mother—who knows they might have even forced an 11 year-old to share in the misery—and from eventual death in Auschwitz.

Though my circumstances never got as dire as Levi's, not by many miles, moons, I don't know how to measure this, I too have wondered, Why me? Why did I get away, and thousands, millions of others did not. Including my mother and so many of my family? Where Levi was, goodness was so remote that when Lorenzo appeared to him, Levi seemed reminded of this marvel in human beings. These were conditions when it is possible to forget human goodness. Lorenzo. By his presence, Lorenzo reminded Levi "that there still existed a just world outside our own, . . . a remote possibility of good, . . . for which it was worth surviving." Would I have been able to sustain my hopefulness and optimism if we had been in Auschwitz instead of Rivesaltes—where I would have ended up as my mother did, had I not escaped? The goodness in Lorenzo led to Levi's managing "not to forget that I myself was a man."

I do not know enough to even offer an hypothesis as to why Primo Levi, after so many years of surviving brought an end to his life by throwing himself down the stairwell of his apartment house. Over the course of many years of clinical experience, two of my patients committed suicide. It is always tragic; it sometimes makes sense. Given his sanity—most depression is not insanity—and being the man he was, I am certain that to him it made sense. Forged by my work, even when I don't try, I am trying to understand what motivated the writer to write what he wrote. I need to say again, I am not trying to address why I think this remarkable, admirable human being, killed himself. Unavoidably, as I read, I tried to discern the meaning of Primo Levi's experience. Many readers who are not Psychoanalysts have done the same. But knowing of his suicide, without looking for it, some of the things he said made me think, "Is this a factor that predisposed him to it?" To say it is because he was in Auschwitz is not enough. We all know Auschwitz Survivors who have not and will not commit suicide. To say, yes, but they have thought of suicide is saying nothing. We all, at one time or another have found life so painful that we have thought of suicide. It's part of the human condition. Anyway, one of a number of moments that gave me pause and raised the question of his eventual suicide was when in *Survival in Auschwitz* he speaks of the "selections" to be gassed. He tells us that "Rene, . . . so young and robust, ended on the left [that is, selected to be gassed.] . . . [It was] probably . . . a simple mistake: Rene passed the commission immediately in front of me and there could have been a mistake with our cards. . . . The hypothesis is probable; I do not know what I will think tomorrow and later. . . ." I read into this that Levi may have believed he was spared by mistake. Given that Levi was a valuable enough commodity, he was a Chemist who could help them produce their ersatz rubber, his being spared most likely

was not a mistake. It may be that his assumption that a mistake had been made was driven by guilt at surviving, at being chosen not to go to the left—to survive.

This passage gave me pause. I have contemplated that problem myself, guilt at having survived; it weighs in now and then. Generally, I don't feel guilty that I survived whereas so many of my family including my mother, probably my father and my brother, were "lawfully" murdered. But now and then a most distressing feeling gets hold of me invariably attached to a thought that is difficult to dismiss. I have wondered if my escape from Rivesaltes—and my mother's own subsequent escape and recapture—labeled her as an "undesirable, recalcitrant guest of the Rivesaltes Concentration Camp" and contributed to her being selected for hell, first of course to the dead-bodies-gas chambers, with their fecal and urinary remains, and then sanctification by burning in hell. Did my escape contribute to that? Once I was under the roof of the OSE, I was protected against the French Gestapo. Was selecting my mother revenge? Or simply the whim of some Jew-hater? I guess I have not been able to protect myself against at least some guilt at surviving.

Again I paused, resonating with Levi's reaction to inmate Kuhn's prayer to God, thanking him for his not having been selected like Rene was. Levi rages: "Does Kuhn not understand that what happened today is an abomination, which no propitiating prayer, no expiation by the guilty, which no thing at all in the power of man can ever clean again. If I were God, I would spit at Kuhn's prayer." What a dilemma to be grateful in such moments because one is not selected. What words can we use to say well enough what we feel. I know, that's been said many times, by much better writers. But I am trying to bear witness; how do I tell my experience? If I say that Levi is indignant at Kuhn's prayer is that enough? Levi rages at Kuhn's prayer. If Levi could

make it happen, he would have God spit on it. If we pray, if we believe there is a God, how do we thank God for not having turned the Nazis on those of us who survived? How do we thank God for having been spared when those who were not were our own family?

Suicide is not always in the domain of the insane. All good writers and good philosophers are good psychologists. Levi muses. "Strange, how in some way one always has the impression of being fortunate . . . [it] stops us crossing the threshold of despair and allows us to live." And this is one of the puzzling things in all this Holocaust misery. How, with all that happened, how can Levi, and I have felt this often myself, how can we feel fortunate? Where does such positiveness, optimism, come from? As a Mental Health person who thinks about things like that, I have not yet come to a sufficiently well developed answer to this question. All I'll say here is that it very likely had much to do with surviving; not with having been lucky to survive; with having had the mental, psychological and emotional will to survive. Levi writes, "It's raining freezing rain, but its not windy; it's raining and it's windy but today I get a supplemental ration. . . ." And here is where that will can further operate to decide one's survival. And, Levi writes, "if you really felt nothing in your heart but suffering and tedium . . . – well, even in that case, at any moment you want you could go out and touch the electric wire-fence, or *throw yourself* under the shunting train, and then it would stop raining." I italicized those words, wondering if this image, coming from Levi's own mind, his own writing, was enacted when he decided to end his life, that he "felt nothing in [his] heart but suffering and tedium". I have never felt that kind of unmitigated suffering. But I was not in Auschwitz; I was in Rivesaltes, where the

fences were not electrified and there was no gassing and no burning in hell. But my mother was. Is this the voice of guilt at surviving? My guilt pales next to Levi's.

Why did Primo Levi *throw himself* to his death? I don't need to know the answer. Why down the stairwell of his apartment building, from three floors up? Does that matter? A Biographer tells us that he was depressed already as a young man, before he was sent to Auschwitz in January 1944. I was in the U. S. for twenty months by then. I escaped going to Auschwitz. Had I not escaped I would have been on Convoy #19; I would have made 992 of us. A gift to Hitler's megalomania, courtesy of the illustrious *Gouvernement de la France Libre; Libre? Vichy-France*.

Contemplating his being chosen to work in the Laboratory, out of the winter cold, no beatings, no threats, no insults, Levi reflects guilt-burdened. Guilt-burdened that the others were not shielded as he, he tells us that "the comrade of all my peaceful moments, . . . – the pain of remembering . . . attacks me like a dog the moment my conscience comes out of the gloom". Where does one draw the line? When does one say, "No, I will not be privileged; I will stay and suffer with the others"? When does one do that? Should I have refused to escape from Rivesaltes, should I not have left my mother alone? Should I have refused to leave France for America? Should I have gone with her to Auschwitz?

